WILD EELIN

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WILD EELIN

Loud winds, low winds, to every maid her lover,
Where'er the sunlight shines, where'er the shadows hover;
But my dear love comes never, oh, never, back to me,
Nor by the shore, nor by the hills, nor by the Northern Sea.

WILD EELIN

HER ESCAPADES, ADVENTURES, AND BITTER SORROWS

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF 'MACLEOD OF DARE,' ETC.

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WILD EELIN

CHAPTER I.

ALIENS.

The calm of a Sabbath morning lay all along the wide valley; not a sound disturbed the perfect silence, save now and again the call of a curlew or the soft winnowing of a pesewepe's wings; the pools in the Garva river—deep and dark and tea-brown under the wooded banks, but of a bold clear turquoise blue out in the open—were still as glass; while the shallows down by the ford, where the water raced and chased and glanced and glittered over the beds of pebbles, were so far away that the continuous smooth murmur of them was hardly audible in the basking and sunlit air. The heather was just getting to its richest bloom; so that the knolls and slopes and lower heights showed every hue and gradation of warm rose-lilac, touched here and there with the yellowish-green of the bracken; but above and beyond these the mountainous hills stretching to the west—the great undulating masses that looked out and over to Knoidart, and Glenelg, and Skye—were of a pale and ethereal azure, receding, billow after billow, and billow after billow, under the cloudless dome.

In the midst of this strath stands Kinvaig House, once the plain, and bare, and unpretentious ancestral home of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig, but now transformed into a modern shooting-lodge, with bay-windowed additions, kennels, and keepers' cottages, all complete. And on this particular morning the profound sleep and silence that

prevailed within the main building appeared to have extended to the outlying dependencies as well ; there was no sign of life anywhere ; if the people were awake—and surely they were awake at this hour—they did not choose to stir abroad ; the little hamlet was as the home of the dead. Indeed, it is a peculiarity of the Scottish peasant that, except in going to or returning from church—when there happens to be a church within reach—he is shy of showing himself on Sundays ; he prefers the inside of his dwelling and a godly book.

But of a sudden the all-pervading stillness was broken in upon ; the front door of the lodge was thrown open with a clang ; and there stepped forth a young man, bareheaded, and in evening dress. He was about six-and-twenty ; undersized and stout ; of irregular and podgy features and pasty complexion ; clean-shaven ; his blue-grey eyes looking bleared and bemused in unexpectedly facing the light ; his close-cropped fair hair unkempt ; his white neck-tie awry. In short, this person—who bore no less a name and title than George Reginald Talbot Fitz-Ingram Taylyour, fifth Marquess of Mountmahon—had a general aspect of being partly butler and partly prize-fighter, with a dash of potboy thrown in ; while it was evident that he had been asleep in these evening garments ; and this in truth was the literal fact, for he had just stumbled along from the gun-room, where he had passed the last half-dozen hours.

At once the uproar began.

"Here ! Hi ! Macalister !—Sandy !—Colin !—where the devil have you all got to ?" he bellowed. "I want the dogs let out ! Hi ! Angus !—where the blazes are you ?"

He stepped back into the hall, and returned with a whip, the horn handle of which contained a whistle ; and on this instrument he blew and blew with a ferocity that sent the echoes flying along the hollow glen. In the midst of the clamour the under-sash of a window was raised, and a head looked out. It was the head of a young woman, of rather attractive appearance, only that the beraddled face gave evidence that her pillow had not wholly robbed her complexion of its over-night powder and rouge.

"Oh, kennel up, you silly fool !" she called down to him, in accents of equal anger and scorn. "You silly idiot, why

don't you let other people sleep, if you can't sleep yourself! Go and smother your head in a haystack!"

He did not pay any attention to her taunts; but at this very moment her ladyship's pet spaniel, excited by the noise and confusion, came rushing and barking along the hall. Whether it did mean to tear the podgy young man's clothing it is impossible to say; but, at all events, he seemed to think so; for directly it reached the doorstep he struck at it viciously with his whip, and the next second it was howling and yelping through the hall again.

"You —— brute!" said the young woman with the patchwork face, and her eyes were glittering with rage.

She vanished for an instant, and immediately reappeared; and now she held in both hands a large ewer, which she heaved bodily out. It missed the young man by just an inch or two, falling on the flagstone with a terrific crash, and splintering into a thousand fragments. He noticed the smash, of course; but otherwise he did not seem to comprehend what had occurred. This poor, stupid, besotted oaf standing there did not know that he had been within an ace of discovering the Great Secret—the secret that has absorbed the longings and aspirations of the wisest of the earth since ever the human race began to think and wonder.

But the bawling and yelling had not been without result. There emerged into the sunlight, from the door of one of the cottages, a tall, thin, quiet-visaged elderly man, who looked to see what was the matter; and then, in obedience to a further peremptory summons, he crossed the open space of greensward and came along the carriage-drive. As he drew nearer, he regarded in a concerned and scared way the shattered fragments of the ewer that lay about on the flagstone and on the adjacent gravel; but his lordship did not vouchsafe any explanation.

"Here, you, Angus," he said, abruptly, "go and put my rod together, and bring it down to the Corran Pool. And the gaff, and my fly book."

The old man seemed hardly willing to believe his ears.

"I'm sure," said he, very gently and respectfully, "your lordship will not be remembering—it's the Sabbath morning——"

"What's that to me, or to you, either? Go and get the rod—and at once!"

"I am not wishing to displease your lordship," said the grey-haired man with the deeply-lined brow and rather sad and sunken eyes, "I am not wishing that at all——"

"Then you refuse?" said the potboy.

"Your lordship," pleaded the other, "I am not wishing to displease your lordship; but I have lived in Glengarva for over sixty years, and I was never asked before to go fishing with a gentleman on the Sabbath-day. And I would not like my daughter to be hearing of it—or any that's related to me—or the minister——"

"Hold your row, then. You refuse?"

There was no answer—and no show of stubbornness: only silence, and resignation.

"Very well," continued the potboy, vindictively—or as vindictively as his thick speech allowed—"very well. Out you pack. Do you hear? I'll give you twenty minutes to start off from this neighbourhood; and you can send for your things when you like. Do you understand, now? And don't you imagine Sir Charles Orme will interfere. He knows when he has a good tenant. I'm the master here. Do you understand, now? Out you go—I give you twenty minutes."

The grave-faced old fisherman probably saw that no protest would avail him.

"As your lordship wills," he said, submissively; and with that he turned and left.

A few minutes thereafter his lordship might have been seen wending his solitary way across the wide strath—a strange, black, bizarre figure in this sunlit world of light yellows and greys and greens. Apparently his dazed brain had abandoned or forgotten his project of going fishing, for he carried no rod, but all the same his uncertain steps were leading him to the river. And at length, when he did reach the Corran Pool—at this point the stream is shallow on the hither side, with level banks of sand, but on the further side it runs deep and dark under a steep brae hanging with birches—at this point he stopped and looked vaguely and aimlessly about him, as if not knowing how he had come there. Then he began to strip, throwing his clothes carelessly to the ground; then the mother-naked man waded in; then the yielding shingle gave way underneath his feet; finally he plunged forward into the deeper

water, and struck out. He was a good swimmer—his body being built that way; and presently he was going well, hand over hand, with his legs jerking behind him like the legs of a frog, and yellow as the legs of a frog, by reason of the brown of the water. But if he was fat, he was also scant of breath; ere long he was on the bank again, puffing and blowing, and wiping the water from his eyes and from the short and stubbly hair of his bullet head. And then—as the morning was sunny and warm—and as he was fatigued—and as he had a habit of humouring the whim of the moment—he pulled on part of his underclothing, to dry himself, he rolled up his waistcoat and put it on the sand to serve as a pillow, he lay down and dragged his crumpled dress-coat over him, and in about a couple of seconds was fast asleep.

And now it was that two others came strolling across the spacious valley. The one was Lady Mountmahon, who had found time to re-incarnadine her cheeks, and make up her heavily-marked eyebrows and eyelashes, and arrange the abundant masses of chaff-coloured hair that flaunted themselves to the sun. She wore a loose morning gown of light green satin, and a Balmoral bonnet of rose-red velvet that had an eagle's feather struck on one side of it. Her companion was a short and slim young man, of cadaverous hue, whose odd expression of eye and twisted mouth seemed to say that if he were not a comic actor then he had thrown away the chances bestowed upon him by a beneficent fate: indeed there was little doubt of his being what he himself would probably have called a "pro." of some kind or other, just as Lady Mountmahon herself had been, when she was famous as Carrie Milton of the metropolitan music-halls. This Mr. Arthur Hoskins, now walking with her, was clad in a knickerbocker suit of the most violent pattern—just about sufficient to bring down a grouse-cock at fifty yards; but as he had not attempted the kilt, much must be forgiven him. Both of them were talking and jesting merrily; their laughter was loud in the hushed autumn air.

But presently she said—

"Arthur, mon vieux, I'm afraid the whole of us are a bit dotty this morning, after the wild games of last night. Do you know I came near to splitting open Mounty's skull about an hour ago—though you mayn't think that possible,

Oh, but it's true. He slashed my poor Tartarin with that heavy dog-whip of his; and I was so mad with rage I pitched an empty ewer at him from the window——"

"Ewer the pitcher, in fact," he observed, with a professional grin.

"You don't appear to recognise the gravity of the situation," she replied, coolly. "It was very near kingdom come with that gay youth. And then what does he go and do? Why, he goes and sacks old Angus! What next? First the head-keeper; now the water-bailiff. Do you think Sir Charles Orme will stand it? No, he won't! He's not such a Jay. These people do look after his interests. But I suppose Mounty wants to get every decent and respectable person turned off the estate, so that we shall be left to ourselves. And we're a pretty crew!"

"Some of us are, your ladyship," her companion said, politely. "Others of us have no pretensions that way."

"Well, I won't let Angus go!" she said, with frowning brows. "Blessed if I do! He's a pal o' mine. A decent, respectable old man like that; why, there's not one of us fit to black his boots——"

"I am—I admit it," Hoskins put in, penitently.

"Well, he's not going to leave!" she continued, hotly. "The decent old man! He shall not leave—he shall not! I'll see Mounty —— first—and that's all about it!"

Her eyes were at this moment attracted by some black object lying ahead of them.

"And what's he up to now? What *is* he up to now?" she cried, in tones of hopeless vexation. "Look at him! Sleeping on the ground! Another dress-suit gone—twenty guineas chucked—when you've got to take a corkscrew to get a fiver out of him——"

But as they drew nearer and nearer to that motionless heap that lay prone on the sand, her scrutiny had been growing more and more curious and suspicious; and at last she uttered a piercing shriek, and stopped, and shrank back.

"He's dead!" she screamed, regarding the lifeless bundle with horror. "It's a corpse! I won't go near it! I won't touch it!——"

Her companion went quickly on.

"He's all right, Lady Mountmahon," he said, "only a little out of gear. If your ladyship will kindly turn your

head for a minute, I'll set him on his pins, and get him into his clothes."

It was a difficult matter, for the drowsy man was sulky and sullen; but after a time—with much patience on one side, and a good deal of cursing on the other—the task was accomplished. And then his lordship had to face his wife.

"Aren't you sober yet, old Sleepitoff?" she demanded, scornfully.

"I'm hungry," he said, with half-opened eyes.

"Hungry?" she retorted—and she had a raucous tongue when she chose. "Then it's whisky-hunger, and that's what it is. You had supper at five o'clock this morning, and you were gorging like a hog and drinking like a fish."

"Oh, hold your jaw, or I'll brain you!" he muttered. "Here, Arthur, give me a cigar."

"Arthur, you won't do anything of the kind," she interposed, peremptorily. "As for you, old muddle-head, do you want to be made sick? And I wonder how we're going to get you smuggled into the house, without the servants seeing you! An elegant object you are, to be sure! They might set you up for a scarecrow, if only you looked a little more like a man——"

"Will you hold your row, you gutter-snipe, or I'll gouge your eyes out!" his lordship growled. But there was no great danger in the threat—and she knew it.

Indeed, something else now claimed her attention, as she kept glancing eagerly forward. The silent lodge they had left amid its pastoral surroundings had been transformed into a scene of feverish activity; the members of the house-party had all come outside, and were as busy as ants; the gentlemen were carrying dishes, joints, knives, forks, crystal, and the like; the ladies were engaged in laying out a table that had been brought on to the lawn; this one called to that, and that to this; gaudy costumes flitted to and fro; a kind of witches' carnival seemed in progress, with an abundance of bandied jibes and giggling.

"And why the—who the—what the—mischief are they doing now?" exclaimed the hostess of these people.

"I should say they were going to give us breakfast, or luncheon, or whatever it is, out of doors," replied Arthur Hoskins.

"Oh, very well," she said, good-naturedly. And then she

turned to her husband. "Here, wake up, Mounty, man! Wake up, and give yourself a show. You know you're not such a bad old crock, if you wouldn't go and drink yourself blind." She dusted the sand from his clothes, and tried to make him look a little more presentable. "We'll start you on a tumbler of fizz, and that will put some life into you. I see they've told the servants to keep indoors. Quite right. You'll have to take the head of the table, and I'm sure you'll be a beautiful example to all of us, in the way of sobriety, and wisdom, and wit."

And at last the things were ready; the host and hostess took their places; and at once the riff-raff crowd began their carouse. There was a tea-urn on the table, it is true; but it was not brought into requisition; for standing well in evidence were a few bottles of champagne, and when these had been passed round and exhausted, Lady Mountmahon kept sending one of her 'boys,' as she called them, for more, and more, and more; so that in time the fictitious mirth rose to an extraordinary pitch. Every one was talking at once; no one heeding the other; even a loudly-challenged statement gave no pause; jeers and derisive laughter provoked no retort; so fiercely and furiously did the wassail rage. But when the delights of eating and drinking were beginning to pall, it occurred to a cunning youth who had brought out his banjo with him that he could not only vary the programme but also check this flooded torrent of excited verbiage. He got the instrument from under his chair, and twanged a few chords, which were instantly recognised.

"Let's have it, Johnny!" bawled his lordship, who was now as vociferous and hilarious as any of them.

The tumult momentarily ceased; and in the unnatural calm that followed a thin, cracked voice arose, recounting the adventures of a certain Sairey Jane. It was a poor, weak, contemptible performance—the only strength of it lying in its coarse suggestiveness; but at the end of each verse the whole table came in with an exultant, strident, discordant chorus—

"Now mind you, Sairey Jane,
Whatever you may do,
That the missus,
O the missus,
That the missus can play pranks as well as you."

Then some one called out "A Barn-Door!"—and some one else called out "Yes, a Barn-Door!" and their hostess, jumping to her feet, cried aloud "Very well: get your partners!"—at which there was a scrambling up from the table, and a general snatching and pushing and shuffling that gradually resolved itself until the expectant couples waited the signal from the banjo. Now the "Barn-Door" can be danced with perfect propriety: it can also be danced with impropriety, not to say indecency, according to the temperament of the onlooker; and on this occasion, as soon as the banjo had started them off, it was pretty obvious that these people meant to 'let themselves go.' Nay, they warmed to their work—those hot-eyed Bacchanals and frenzied Corybantes: there were collisions, and shrieks that startled the still air; the women vied with each other in their display of white under-skirt; the men roared with laughter in encouraging them. In short—for the subject is not an alluring one—it looked as if hell had broken loose in Glengarva, on this peaceful Sabbath morning; but a tawdry, vulgar, sordid hell; the hell of Piccadilly Circus when the music-halls have vomited forth their vilest.

CHAPTER II.

FROM OVER THE SEA.

On this same day an open landau was being driven out from Invergarva, bringing two strangers into the secluded glen. One of them was an old man of striking appearance—an old man of quite unusual stature; his long, flowing beard of a yellowish-white; his pinched and pinkish features speaking of habitual exposure to the weather; a dark blue Balmoral bonnet crowning his picturesque head. His companion was a much younger man—about thirty or so—and not nearly so tall, but of great muscular breadth of frame; his face thoughtful and refined; his clear brown eyes steady and contemplative, and kindly withal. These two were father and son; and the latter was describing to the former—who appeared to be stone-blind—the various points of the landscape as they came into view; though he was continually being interrupted, for the old man kept eagerly suggesting this or that detail borrowed from his own mental picture, to find out if he had remembered rightly, through the long interval of years.

"Yes, yes," he was saying, in an excited fashion—and, if he did not see, he certainly seemed to see, and vividly—"that's the Brae Pool—the steep bank and the bushes—a terrible place for losing flies. And there's a big rock up at the corner—can you make it out, Lad?—and a great black hole underneath—I wonder none of us boys were ever drowned there—when we were after rowans or nuts; and then from the corner there's a wide stretch of shingle and sand leading away along to the Whirl Pool—isn't that so, Somerled?"

"Quite right, father," the other made answer. "And in

the middle of the valley, on the shingle, there are the stumps of one or two uprooted trees—nearly white—and half-buried——"

"What, still there?" he exclaimed. "Why, man, these were trees that came down in the great flood!—well I mind it—the water was up to the doorstep of Kinvaig House—and the ferry boat was whirled away along to Farlies. So the big roots are still sticking out of the sand?—to think of that now!—a fine hiding-place they were for us boys for anything the keepers were not to see."

"There appears to be a small church on the top of the hill just in front of us."

"Of course, man, of course! Kinvaig church! But how should you know? And it's a pity there's no service to-day; maybe one or two of the old folk might have remembered the tall teacher. That was my name in the Gaelic—the tall teacher. Ay, I was a long-legged lad; I could put the miles behind me. And so we've come to the steep hill—and the church; there used to be a row of Scotch firs—along the crest——"

"Just beyond the church—yes."

"Well I mind them—well, well; and larches sloping down the other side—a famous place for the roe when we were beating the woods. And the firs—the Scotch firs—they're a landmark: they're visible all the way from Ben-an-Sloich, or Ben Vora, or even as far west as Strathgorm, and they tell to every one that near by is the old burying-place of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig. My word for it, Somerled, when we bade good-bye a week or two ago to the Macdonalds of the Canadian Kinvaig, I warrant you there were many of them thinking of the Scotch firs on the crest of the hill."

The horses toiled up the long ascent, and when they had reached the summit, the driver was bidden to halt, in front of the entrance to the church and churchyard. Somerled Macdonald got out first, to assist his father; but, indeed, when the splendid old man stood in the road, bearing his six feet four of height right nobly, he did not look as if he were much in need of help—had it not been for his lack of vision. Then the younger man opened a wooden box that was on the front seat of the carriage, and took therefrom a wreath of evergreens; this he handed to his father; then

he placed his fingers lightly on the old man's arm, and the two of them entered the small graveyard on the hill.

These were humble and unpretentious tombstones for the most part, and nearly all of them bearing the name of Macdonald ; but there was one of somewhat more importance—a tall Iona cross it was, of red granite—and to this the younger man made his way. His surmise was correct ; he read the legend 'Æneas John Macdonald of Kinvaig.'

"It is just in front of you, father," he said.

The old man felt for his footing, and put out his hand and touched the stone ; then he removed his cap, he knelt down on one knee, and reverently placed the wreath at the foot of the cross. In the midst of the cunningly intertwisted evergreens there was a simply-written card bearing these words : "Homage at the grave of our Chief—from the Macdonalds of Kinvaig, Ontario, Canada." Old Allan Macdonald remained kneeling there for several minutes ; then he rose—ready to be led away.

"Father," said his son, "the flowers on the grave are quite fresh—they have been recently tended."

"Ay, do ye say that ?" the old man responded, quickly. "Maybe, then, the Bean-an-Tighearn * herself and Miss Eelin have been here : it would have been strange if we had met them just at the goal of our pilgrimage. But it is of little matter if we have missed them : they will surely not take it ill if I make so bold as to call on them when we get to Invernish, and tell them of your errand."

Then he paused for a moment, standing very erect, as if he were gazing abroad with his sightless eyes.

"Somerled, tell me all you can see. Tell me all you can see, out to the farthest hills."

It was a difficult task ; for Somerled Macdonald had never been in this country-side before, and could only describe by appearances, not by names ; but the blind man appeared to recognise feature after feature of the landscape, and followed the recapitulation with intensest interest. And then—having burned the vision into his brain—he suffered himself to be taken back to the carriage ; and they resumed their journey.

"For you must see the big house, Lad," he said ; "and we'll put up the horses at Bridge of Kinvaig ; and maybe

* Pronounced *Ben-an-tyearn*—the Laird's Lady.

we'll find some old body who remembers the tall teacher. And then I would like to go down to the Garva, and sit on the banks for a while. Indeed, that is what has made me drive out on a Sunday—at the risk of offending some of the stricter folk; but I wanted to hear once more the Sabbath silence of Glengarva. It's the strangest thing. I've never heard it anywhere else; but I remember it well as a boy—the Sabbath morning stillness that you could sit and listen to, just as if all the world was whispering to itself. I wonder if I shall be able to hear it now. Perhaps it's only in youth you can hear it, when you are wandering about alone, and thinking of many things. But I should like to try—now that I am in Glengarva once more—and on a still Sabbath morning. I'm thinking, Somerled, we'll take a bit of a stroll down the strath when once we've left the landau at the inn; I suppose the quiet corners by the river side are just the same as ever they were."

And so they drove on along the winding valley, until, from the lofty road they were following, they came to overlook a moderately-sized mansion and its dependencies, set in a level space some way back from the stream. But though Somerled Macdonald guessed readily enough that this was Kinvaig House, he did not speak; his whole attention was absorbed by a motley group of people who were lounging in various attitudes around the table out on the lawn, while the array of champagne bottles on the white cloth looked incomprehensible enough at this early hour. Moreover, he could see that one of those persons was twanging away at a banjo; and presently there came the echo—so faint as to be almost inaudible—of a raucous chorus. And then—as he stared and better stared in amazement—behold! those half-recumbent figures sprang to their feet; there were scurryings this way and that; and finally the whole gang broke into a witches' dance of capering and kicking, with flying toes and tossing skirts, while now and again, even at this distance, the hushed air brought the sound of a brainless yelp or scream. Now young Macdonald had tumbled about the world a good deal; he was tolerant of the manners and customs of other people; but the question was how to get the old man past without his becoming aware of what would doubtless appear to him an absolute horror of desecration. The Sabbath silence of Glengarva?—a Carmagnole instead!

And as ill-luck would have it, old Allan Macdonald's remembrance of his native strath proved to be only too accurate.

"Surely, Lad, we should be about opposite Kinvaig House now?"

"Just down below us, father—out there in the open."

Then the old man would have the carriage stopped, and would have the house minutely described to him—the little square old building and its ivy, the modern wings with their bay windows, the background of shrubbery, and so forth.

"I suppose there's no one about?"

"Not a soul," his son answered, desperately.

"A singular thing now," the old man continued, "I fancied a moment or two ago I heard a sound of singing—distant singing——"

"Oh, that is quite a common delusion, when there's a wide space around you," Somerled rejoined instantly. "I've often seemed to hear that at sea. The fact is, the ear is quite as imaginative as the eye. It plays tricks. It hears imaginary music, just as the eye sees imaginary ghosts—"

"Strange—strange," the old man said—and he was evidently listening with the concentration peculiar to the blind, "I could almost swear that even now there is some kind of measured tapping—like some musical instrument——"

"Father," said the younger man, affecting to laugh the matter away, "your ear is too fanciful; you'll hear the grass growing next—or Knight Roland blowing his magic horn. Go ahead, driver!" And for the moment that danger was escaped.

But worse was in store. For as they descended from these lofty heights to Bridge of Kinvaig, and crossed the river, the solitary little inn came in view; and here also there was an unwonted tumult. Two men, bare-headed and in shirt-sleeves, were out in the middle of the road, playing pitch-and-toss with half-crowns; a third sat cross-legged on the gravel; a fourth lay at full length on the long box used for holding fishing rods; and all of them were bawling bets at each other, and cursing each other with a cheerful lack of discrimination. Through these worthies a general family resemblance ran—short stature, heavy shoulders, hairless face, bullet head, and more or less

broken nose; and if they were too bulbous to be pugilists in proper training, pugilists of some kind they undoubtedly were—pugilists carousing, in fact, for there was a plenitude of tumblers about, and some half-empty champagne bottles stood ranged along the window-sill of the inn. Of course, as the landau drove up, the curiosity of this sorry crew overcame the prevailing clamour; and in the temporary truce Somerled Macdonald hurried his father into the small hostelry—hoping that he had heard nothing.

Fortunately the two travellers were able to secure a tiny back-parlour to themselves; and when the younger man had rung the bell and asked the servant-lass to get ready what luncheon was procurable, he thought he would saunter out by himself to see what manner of persons these were who had invaded this remote Highland glen. They themselves were not likely to inform him, for as he paused on the threshold, he discovered that a savage quarrel had by this time broken out, over the betting, so that the air was thick with oaths and asseverations and crimson adjectives. Indeed, they took no notice of him; and so he strolled on, towards the river; he perceived that a man his father and he had passed on the way was now coming down to the bridge—a decent-looking elderly man with whom he planned to have a few words.

"I beg your pardon, but may I ask if you belong to these parts?" he said to the newcomer.

"I did, sir, until this morning," replied old Angus the fisherman. "I have been living in this strath ever since I was a boy, but I am sent away now."

"How is that?" This younger Macdonald had a curiously direct way of speech, and straightforward eyes; he had the air of one accustomed to govern men.

The story was briefly told.

"Her ladyship was asking me to stay," old Angus added, honestly. "But I am not wishing to make any quarrel."

"And what are you going to do now?" was the next abrupt question.

"I'm going out west to Ben Vora," said the old gillie, in a quiet, resigned way. "My daughter is in service there, at the lodge. And she's a good lass; she will put up with me for a while, until I get a new place. But maybe—

maybe—I have been thinking—I will be too far on in years to seek for a new place now."

"You need not trouble yourself about that," said Somerled Macdonald, in his curt fashion. "And you need not trouble your daughter either. I will get you a new place, or its equivalent—if you like to trust me."

The old man looked bewildered; he was not used to find good fortune drop from the skies.

"Would the gentleman be telling me his name?" he said, timidly.

"My name? Oh, that's nothing. I dare say you never heard of me. But you've heard of my father, no doubt. He ought to be known in this district. You've heard of Mr. Allan Macdonald, of Canada——"

"Him that was sending the free passes?"

"The same. Well, he is my father. And he is in the inn there. Come along and see him: I shouldn't wonder if you and he had many recollections in common, of former days and the old people. Then we'll get a bit of something to eat; and you'll drive back with us to Invergarva; and to-morrow you'll go on with us to Invernish. I suppose there are several of the Kinvaig Macdonalds in Invernish?"

"Oh yes, that, sir."

"And you wouldn't mind living in a town? If you were to get some employment in Invernish you would feel yourself just as much at home there as here?"

"Far more, sir—far more. There's no home here for me now," answered old Angus.

"Then set your mind at rest," said the younger man, in a kind of authoritative way—but perhaps his bluntness was due to business habits and a long-acquired habit of saving every minute of time. "I'll get some place for you in Invernish, with not too heavy work; and if you still crave for the river-side, you can have a turn at the Nish, on the free days, you know. So come along and see my father. But first of all, tell me, who are these men in the roadway there?"

"They're the prize-fighters, sir, that his lordship keeps at the inn," was the reply, uttered in a low voice, so that no one should overhear. "And in the evening they go down to the big house, to amuse the gentry."

"God help us all," said Somerled, half to himself, "I

wonder how I am going to get my father out of this infernal den, without his suspecting anything? And this is what has come to Glengarva, and to the old home of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig!"

They got through the brawling gang without molestation, and entered the little back-parlour; and greatly delighted was old Allan Macdonald to find a fellow-clansman who could remember the small thatched cottage in which the tall teacher had taught his elementary class, five-and-forty years before. There were all sorts of reminiscences, and eager questions and willing answers; but ever and anon the home-comer from Canada would bring the talk back to the Bean-an-Tighearn and Miss Eelin, the mother and daughter who in a way represented the sentimental chieftainship of the Kinvaig Macdonalds. Were they approachable ladies? They would not take it ill if two strangers—claiming to be of the clan—and hailing from a far country—wished to call on them and pay their respects to them? Or perhaps they would rather not be reminded of the proud position once held by their family? They might resent intrusion? Well, these were rather recondite questions for the old water-bailiff, who, besides, with all a Highlander's caution, was anxious not to commit himself and give offence; but on one point old Angus was explicit enough.

"There is not in ahl the Highlands," he said, "two leddies that are as kind as them: I am sure of it. There is nothing they will not try to do for the poor people and the old people of Glengarva: the sewing, and the knitting, and the sending of wool, and the buying of the stockings when they are made. And every one knows it is not because they are rich, for it is many a day since the estate passed away from the family; but the Bean-an-Tighearn and Miss Eelin they will always be having a little help for any one that is sick. And there is the parcels-post now-a-days—they have not to come aweh down from [illegible] vernish——"

"But I suppose they sometimes pay the old [illegible] visit?"

"Is it Kinvaig?" said old Angus, in obvio[illegible] perhaps even in a kind of hurt way. "[illegible] Tighearn and Miss Eelin would not be co[illegible]

house now——" He stopped suddenly; and then he said in an evasive manner: "When they are driving out from Invergarva to put flowers on the grave-stone, mebbe there is not much time to get back to catch the evening steamer. And I am not thinking they are very well acquent with his lordship."

"And when you were sent adrift this morning—as my son tells me—had you no idea of turning to the Bean-an-Tighearn for assistance of one kind or another?"

"While I have my two hands left to me," said Angus, with quiet dignity, "it is not me that would be troubling the Bean-an-Tighearn for anything; she has plenty of others to look after."

At this point luncheon was brought in; and the servant-lass was bidden to set another place at table. But they could not persuade the old fisherman to sit down with them; he said he would go into the kitchen and get a bite; and he would be waiting outside for the gentlemen, if they were so kind as to think of taking him with them to the town of Invernish. When he had gone, the tall teacher said, proudly——

"You see, Lad, I'm not quite forgotten in my native glen, even apart from the emigration business. And when we've finished luncheon, we'll just stroll down to the river-side, and wander along for a while, to find out if my memory serves. And if we were to get as far as Kinvaig House, I might chance to see his lordship: I'm sure it was only a bit of temper his dismissing the old gillie that has been water-bailiff for so many years."

"Surely you're not going to beg that he should be taken back!" the son said, indignantly.

"Oh, well, no—no. He'll be better with you, if you have undertaken to look after him: he'll discover he has got into safe hands. We'll merely take a stroll along the strath, as far as Kinvaig House——"

But at this point Somerled Macdonald broke out, in eration—

ther, you're not going anywhere near Kinvaig House; ll you why. I have been concealing the truth and it's better you should know it. You did we came by—the strumming of a banjo at was a crowd of men and women on the

lawn at Kinvaig, dancing, and shrieking, and kicking their heels in the air—most of them drunk, I should say, from the number of bottles on the table. And this very inn is the headquarters of a lot of prizefighters; and at this moment they're out at the front, bawling, blaspheming, and drinking, and gambling; and they're maintained here by his lordship that they may amuse the ladies and gentlemen at the lodge. Pah, the whole place reeks with abominations—a sink of iniquity; and if you want to have the Glengarva of your youth restored, why, you'll just have to buy the strath from end to end, and flood it down with carbolic acid, and clear out this mangy riff-raff, and bring back a few decent Highland folk, either from Invernish or from Ontario——"

"What's this you're saying, Laddie? Are ye out of your senses?" the old man cried in bewilderment.

So there had to be a more minute and detailed description; but the refrain was ever the same—

"Buy back the glen, father—and sweep out that scum!"

"Na, na, lad," said the other, more quietly. "That's a scheme that springs quickly enough to a young brain like yours. It's nothing to you—you, the great pioneer—the great railroad king——to think of drafting a population here or there; but such enterprises are not for me at my years——"

"And who founded Kinvaig in Ontario?" demanded his son.

"That was a while ago—a while ago," he answered, absently. And then he said: "Well, Somerled, if this is the state of things in Glengarva, we'd better quit. Let's go away back at once. Ring and send word to have the horses put to."

So they prepared to leave, but they were not to be allowed to depart in peace. When they got outside, they found the landau awaiting them, and Angus Macdonald on the box beside the driver; and they were about to cross the intervening few yards to enter the carriage, when one of the bullet-headed bystanders called out—

"You, there, Conky, give the blooming giant a drink!"

The person called Conky, who had possessed himself of a bottle and glass for his own private use, at once interposed between the blind man and the door of the landau.

"Here y'are, sir!" and he thrust forward a half-filled glass.

"No, thanks—no, thanks!" said Somerled Macdonald, impatient and frowning, as he tried to guide his father into the carriage.

But the crop-haired fool would not budge; so there was nothing for it but to push him aside—gently but firmly to push him aside. And in an instant peace had become war.

"Who are you a-shovin' of, you — —— — —? You a gemman—you? I'll give you half-a-minute to take off your coat—half-a-minute, neither more nor less, you — — — —." And with that he dashed the bottle and glass on to the gravel, and came striding forward, not even allowing the thirty seconds of proffered truce.

Now here was the problem to be solved. Given A, a perfectly pacific person, ignorant of fisticuffs, and B, a professional bruiser, bent on furious fight: how is A to escape from the situation with any measure of safety! The solution is simple, if A have sufficient nerve. All he has to do is suddenly, with his left hand, to snatch off his hat or cap, and bring it violently down on B's face—and the man is not of women born who can avoid flinging up both arms to guard himself against such an amazing attack; at the same moment A drives his right fist into whatever portion of B's carcase is nearest him; and the next second B is prone in the roadway, a doubled-up and amorphous heap. It is not, perhaps, an altogether sportsmanlike manœuvre; but in certain circumstances it is distinctly legitimate; and it is undoubtedly effective. On this occasion what happened happened all in the twinkling of an eye; and the broken-nosed bully went swinging into the gutter, where he lay with his elbows interclasped, like a monkey embracing a cocoa-nut. The strange thing was that his chums made no effort to take his part. Nay, they jeered and scoffed at him. "Served him right, the — —! Why didn't he let the gemman alone? Come out o' there, Conky, or the horses'll be on the top o' you!"

"Somerled," said old Allan Macdonald, as they drove away, "what was all that about?"

"Oh, nothing, father, nothing," was the reply.

"I thought I heard a man go down with a crash."

"Oh, well"—and here Somerled Macdonald did smile a little—"perhaps he's thinking now he has got toothache—but it isn't in the place where toothache is usually felt."

CHAPTER III.

'SO YOUNG, MY LORD, AND TRUE.'

"I AM good, I am beautiful, and I am modest," said Wild Eelin, entering the room; "but it is a cruel and a wicked world, and I am not appreciated." She took the big, black, green-eyed tom-cat from her shoulder, and threw it on to a couch. "Beelzebub, if you have no further news for me from the place below, I have no further use for you—shoo! —away, impostor!" And then she turned to her mother, who was reading a newspaper. "Mother, I am going into the town: do you want anything sent out?"

She was a young girl of about nineteen or twenty, hardly over middle height, of slim and graceful figure, and of unmistakeably Highland aspect—Highland in the clear whiteness of her skin, that had rather over than under its due of rose-leaf tint in the cheeks, but above all Highland in her large, liquid, lustrous, deep-blue eyes that, set about with their dark eyelashes, were of a quite indescribable loveliness—they seemed to suggest somehow the wild and strange beauty of a moonlight night at sea. Perhaps her straight nose and full and finely-cut mouth might have lent something imperative and commanding to her appearance; but she was not quite tall enough for that; besides she was young—younger even than her years; and then again her general expression seemed to say of her that her heart was wholly rippling over with laughter, and frolicsomeness, and the abundant delight of living. With three or four inches added to her stature, and with a dozen years added to her age, she might have posed as a sibyl: as things were—well, she was just Wild Eelin, as her companions often called her, though her Gaelic-speaking friends had a finer name for her than that: to them she was 'Eelin of the eyes like

the sea-wave.' For the rest, she was dressed with extreme simplicity and neatness—her blouse being of the Macdonald tartan ; and the circular silver brooch she wore at her neck was not set with any precious stones ; it merely had these three words engraved on it, 'The Eagle's Crag'—which is the slogan of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig.

Her mother glanced upward from the paper. She was a slight, silver-haired, sweet-voiced lady, who mayhap looked all the more fragile and delicate, and timid in contrast with the robuster colour and brave demeanour of her daughter.

"Really, Eelin," she said, in almost piteous tones, "I must protest——"

"What is it now, mother!"

"I have just been reading the last of those White Cockade articles. Really—really, Eelin, you don't seem to know the lengths you're going. Why, you are openly making love to this young man!"

"He is not a young man, mother," she responded, with much placidity. "He is a phantom—a ghost—a wandering voice! I have not even seen him in dreams ; I meet him only in the columns of the Invernish *Observer*, published every Saturday, price one penny."

"You don't appear to understand!" remonstrated the anxious mother. "Behind all this farrago of moonlight walks, and pretended correspondence, and assignations, there is an actual person ; and you have no means of knowing who or what that person may be."

"An actual person!—a common and ordinary person!—why, mother, he's not a person at all—he's a poet! And you want me to stop giving him that little bit of encouragement and approval for which every poet pines! How can you be so cruel! And another thing, look at the consequences of suppressing a poet? Have you ever thought of the awful consequences of suppressing a poet! He might burst!"

"I dare say he knows perfectly well who you are, if you don't know who he is," continued the mother ; "and sooner or later there will be an introduction, brought about by somebody—there is always that possibility ; and then what will you have to say?"

For answer the young lady walked up to a large scroll framed and hung on the wall—a genealogical tree, with its

wide-spreading branches dotted all over with white circular spots like so many sixpenny-bits; and, with her forefinger pointing, she began at the base of the stem, proceeding gradually upwards, and proudly naming one name after another.

"Somerled, Thane of Argyle: married the daughter of the King of the Isles—Reginald, King of the Isles—Donald, Lord of the Isles, 1214—Angus, Lord of the Isles—Alexander, Lord of the Isles—Angus, Lord of the Isles—Angus Og, Lord of the Isles—John, Lord of the Isles—Ranald of Dunluce—Æneas Gorm Macdonald of Kinvaig—Donald Macdonald of Kinvaig—Alasdair Glas Macdonald of Kinvaig—Lewis Macdonald of Kinvaig—Somerled Macdonald of Kinvaig—Ranald John Macdonald of Kinvaig—and more—and more; and all of them kin and sib to Kinlochmoidatt, and Keppoch, and Glencoe, and Glengarry; and you ask me, their descendant, to be afraid of meeting face to face some young divinity student—some lawyer's clerk—some town-councillor's son—whatever or whoever he may be! You forget, mother. If I am not 'the daughter of a hundred Earls,' I am the daughter of a thousand Thanes; and by the Red Book of Clanranald I fear no mortal man!" She dropped her heroics. "Mummie, darling, the fact is, you are a hen with only one chick, and you keep cluck-clucking when there's no danger about at all. I don't see the slightest chance of my ever meeting this young gentleman who writes the pretty verses. They'll keep my secret safe enough at the *Observer* office. And even if I were to meet him some day, what would happen? I have a small grain of common sense. I'm not nearly such a fool as I look. So you get rid of all that unnecessary alarm, my dear sweet, excellent mother; and tell me what you want ordered in Invernish, for I've a lot of things to do before dinner-time."

And thus it was that a little while thereafter Miss Eelin Macdonald of Kinvaig (alas! there now remained to them nothing of Kinvaig save the style and title accorded them in courtesy by friends and neighbours) was marching briskly along the banks of the wide and full-flowing river, on this still and peaceful and golden August afternoon. She crossed the vibrating suspension bridge; she continued her way by the side of the stream; then she climbed the

steep Castle-hill, and had a casual look round at the distant mountain ranges, from the ethereal Mealfourvonie in the south to the darker Ben Wyvis in the north; and finally she went on and into the town, to execute her mother's commissions. But when these had all been got through, she found herself (as she had planned) with a little time of her own; and so, to begin with, she went into a small grocer's shop.

"A pound of tea, Mrs. Fordyce, and two pounds of sugar; and as quick as you can, please, for I'm rather in a hurry."

The big, buxom, good-natured-looking woman behind the counter seemed more inclined to pause and have a chat with Miss Eelin than to despatch her business; and so she had again to be urged.

"And how much will that come to?"

"One and eightpence, if ye please, Miss Eelin."

The girl took out her purse, and searched all through it.

"Dear me," she said, "how stupid! I have only got one-and-sixpence-halfpenny with me. You'll just have to take out some of the tea, Mrs. Fordyce."

"I'm sure you'll not be wanting to affront me, Miss Eelin," said the big, soft-featured woman, who appeared to be of a sensitive temperament. "When you know that anything in the shop is at your service—and no question of money at all!"

"Well, well, Mrs. Fordyce," said the young lady, blithely, "if you carry on your shop on sentimental principles of that kind, I wonder how long you'll have a roof over your head. But I'll owe you the three-halfpence—I won't ask you to open the packet—for I want to get along at once to old Granny Sinclair."

"Ay, I thought it was something of that kind," said Mrs. Fordyce, with a smile. "And you'll just owe me the three-halfpence until I ask you for it, Miss Eelin."

Miss Eelin now left the shop, went quickly along to another thoroughfare, passed up a narrow entry, ascended a stair, and knocked at a door and opened it. Apparently she knew her way well, for the next minute found her in a small and rather dusky room, the sole occupant of which was a shrivelled little old woman who lay huddled up in a dilapidated rocking-chair. The window at which she sate looked out upon a courtyard above the high wall of which

some rowan-trees and poplars showed—their sunlit foliage almost motionless against the flecked blue and white of the sky; but she was not regarding these; she had been helplessly staring at her brown and bony fingers, clasped in her lap, until the arrival of this visitor had suddenly aroused her attention.

"Well, Granny," said the newcomer, in her buoyant and matter-of-fact fashion, "has there been no one looking in for a moment to cheer you up, on this fine afternoon?"

"I've just been wearyin' for ye, Miss Eelin," said the old woman, in a quavering voice, "and wonderin' hour by hour whether ye would come. It's a long, long day, now that they're keeping Jean so late: sometimes it's near ten o'clock before she gets home."

"Well, I'm going to make you a cup of tea now," continued Miss Eelin, briskly, "and we'll pull your chair back a bit, and open the window, to freshen the air, you know; and I see your cushion is all slouched down—you must let me help you over to the bed until I get things put straight: and if there's any fire in the kitchen, we'll soon have some hot water——"

And thereupon she set busily to work; and that with a wise motherliness, and dexterity, and tact beyond all praise. If in outward seeming she was even younger than her years, in her judgment, her sagacity, her patient tolerance of weakness or stupidity, her good-humoured dealing with fractious tempers, she was a grown woman of quite exceptional gifts and qualities. Perhaps, indeed, her very youthfulness—or that appearance of fresh and light-hearted youthfulness—stood her in good stead. People who otherwise might have been inclined to stand on their rights and dignities (which are jealously guarded among certain sections of the poorer classes) became more amenable when it was only a mischief-loving, whimsical, domineering slim slip of a girl who was determined on having her own way. In her home and out of it this domineering had come to be a recognised kind of thing; every one, or nearly every one, submitted to it: who was going to take Miss Eelin too seriously, and run all the unimagined risks of offending her and quarrelling with her? But sometimes the timid and apprehensive mother thought of the future—and of a future that might be near.

And on this occasion the intruder forthwith took upon herself the entire control of the little dwelling and its solitary occupant too; she got the hot water and made the tea; she laid the cloth; she went to the cupboard and brought out what remained of a cold leg of mutton (that small joint had made a most desperate hole in Wild Eelin's finances—and all unknown to the Bean-an-Tighearn); she cut one or two thin and neatly-trimmed slices; she added some lettuce leaves, and sprinkled the same with pepper and salt and vinegar; she drew the old dame's chair close to the table; she pulled the window-blind right to the top, for a more cheerful light; and then she said—

"Now, Granny, there you are. And what shall I read to you while you're having your tea?"

"Jean was leaving me a paper there, but I'm feart the print is getting to be too little for my old eyes——"

"This one, is it? Oh, the *Observer*. And what would you like to hear about first—the Births, Deaths, and Marriages, I suppose——"

"Maybe," said old Granny Sinclair, "maybe there's something more about that young lass—her that was wearing the white rosette——"

"Oh, the White Cockade creature—why, you're not interested in her, surely!——"

"Ay, but she's a smart lass, that one," said the old woman, with a dim sort of smile, for these comfortable things before her had enlivened her spirits somewhat; "ay, she has some spunk, that one; and who was telling her all the old stories—and how was she knowing all about the '45 and the wild men of Glenmoriston——"

Miss Eelin burst out laughing.

"Granny, Granny, have you never guessed? Why, that's me! Don't you know that I'm a great authoress? I write poetry, and prose, and lots of other things; and I'm going to write about you; I'm going to describe you as one of the notable heroines of the nineteenth century, because you take everything that happens with such a brave heart, and you never complain—here have I been in the house nearly half-an-hour, and you've never even mentioned the pains in your back, whereas anybody else would have been groaning and whining and yaumering. Have you never guessed—not even when you saw your own recollections put into print?"

The old dame had ceased stirring her tea: she looked stupefied.

"You, Miss Eelin?—is it you?—is it you that's her that stands up for Prince Charlie?"

"And what for no? Bring the ghost of Lord President Forbes before me this minute, and you'll hear the talking I'll give him!"

"And—and—was it yourself that was listening for *Iseabal Bheag nan Brecaig?*"*

"Why, Granny, that was one of your own tales! It was you who told me of the Provost's murder, and how little Isabel happened to see the murderers at work, and how she gave information—that led to her own murder; and how her cries are heard to this day when the evenings are still, along the woods there by the river——"

"And was you hearing them, Miss Eelin?" the old woman said, eagerly.

"Well—that is to say—you know—the girl who signs herself 'White Cockade' makes some kind of pretence of having been listening—and of having heard something; but I wouldn't believe too much, Granny, of what's in the papers. I myself never heard *Iseabal Bheag nan Brecaig*, though I've come past the woods many a time in the very stillest of evenings; but then the girl in the *Observer*, perhaps she has more imagination than I have—and more time to spend along the river-side."

These mystifications seemed to puzzle old Granny Sinclair; and yet she would keep thinking back to what she had been told of the young lass who in these degenerate days had the courage to wear the White Cockade.

"Maybe," she said, "maybe I am not understanding very well, Miss Eelin. Is it yourself that was walking through the Islands—and there was the young man that would be there to read his books—were you seeing him?"

"Bless me, Granny, you're as bad as my mother!" the young lady cried, in an injured way. "How often must I tell you that there's no real young man—it's only a kind of ghost, you know—and so is the girl of the White Cockade, if it comes to that. It's all nonsense and make-believe. I don't know any young man who haunts the Islands—I don't indeed: the only person I know who is always there

* Little Isabel of the Bannocks.

is Mr. Jameson the Keeper—Curator I would call him if I were the Town-Council—poor man, he's about out of his mind just now with rheumatism in his shoulder, and I am going along this very evening with a new kind of embrocation to see if that'll do him any good. The idea that I would walk out to the Islands—or anywhere else—to meet any young man——"

"She was seeing him, if they were not speaking," said the old dame, still vaguely thinking back.

"Yes, yes, the White Cockade girl! Don't you understand? The White Cockade girl may have been up at the Islands, and may have seen a young man pacing about under the trees, and reading a book; but that is all nonsense—that is what they call a romance, and it really doesn't exist. Come, Granny, you must put all these fancies out of your head—though I'm afraid I am responsible for putting them into your head; and you must take me to be just me, and nobody else; and you mustn't imagine I would go out to the Islands expecting to find any young man strolling about, whether he was a poet or only a common person. I should think not indeed! And here we've been chatting and chatting, and I haven't even read you the Births, Deaths, and Marriages yet—so let's get to work!"

But this gossip about the young lady of the White Cockade had occupied much of her available time; and when she had finished the slow reading of the newspaper announcements—slow, so that Mrs. Sinclair might recognise any familiar name—she found that she must hurry off home or be late for dinner. So she removed the tea-things; she brought the big-type Bible, which was the old Highland-woman's easiest reading, and placed it on the table, along with her spectacles; she shook up the cushion, and generally put things to rights; and then, with many farewell admonitions, grave and gay, she took her departure, leaving behind her in the solitary little room a prevailing atmosphere of thankfulness and satisfaction and content.

When she got home, she found she had only a few minutes in which to dress for dinner, but in this brief interval she managed to supplement her costume with a novel form of decoration. This was an oval plaque cast in

lead, some three and a half inches by two and a half, and bearing the following legend in bold relief :

PARISH
OF
HUNTLY
No. 6.

It was, in fact, one of the badges granted in former days by certain parishes in Scotland to superannuated and deserving persons, licensing them to beg within prescribed boundaries. Miss Eelin slipped a bit of blue ribbon through the hole at the top ; she fastened the ribbon round her neck, so that the beggar's warrant was suspended in front ; and then she made haste down into the dining-room, into which her mother had already preceded her. There were only the two of them at table ; it was not often they had visitors.

And at first the gentle, and placid, and smooth-voiced Bean-an-Tighearn did not notice ; but presently her eye happened to light on that ominous intimation and mute prayer. She knew what the dark medal meant.

"Really, Eelin," she said, in accents of hurt remonstrance, "I don't know what to make of you ! Already—and this only the eighth of the month ! What do you do with your pocket-money ? I never see you buying the nick-nacks that other girls get for themselves ; and yet your purse is always empty. I don't understand it, except that you are incurably careless and extravagant."

The culprit said not a word ; doubtless she thought that silence was her best policy. And, indeed, when the elder lady had made a sufficient show of annoyance and reproach, she took out her purse, and selected a sovereign, and pushed it along the table-cloth. That was the signal for Eelin of the wave-blue eyes. In a second she had jumped to her feet, the leaden medallion was thrown aside, and the next moment her arms were round her mother's neck.

"Dearest Mummie, you're just goodness itself ! And I know that money slips through my fingers : I don't believe it's made of silver, or gold, or copper at all ; I believe it's made of the gossamer stuff you see on the hedges on the autumn mornings. But this time—this time there will be a difference ! Sixpence by sixpence—sixpence by sixpence :

you will be fairly amazed at the lasting powers of this sovereign! And thank you, dear little mother, again and again!"

So that matter was happily settled. But there were other adventures lying in wait for Wild Eelin, before she had got through with this evening.

CHAPTER IV.

IN TWILIGHT LAND.

For she had promised to carry along to Mr. Jameson, the Keeper of the Islands, some sort of liniment of strange and startling efficacy; and she impatiently waited for dinner to be over to be allowed to go. And of course the ever-timorous mother would have her take one of the maids with her; and of course this Daughter of a thousand Thanes, who had an excellent opinion of her capacity to look after herself, would have none of such feeble escort.

"For the sake of appearances, Eelin," said the gentle mother.

"Appearances?" she retorted, proudly. "I wonder who is to be judge of the conduct of any one going out from this house! Mother, mother," the girl went on, "sometimes it almost makes me laugh—but just as often I am nearer crying with vexation—to see the way you submit to the airs and pretensions of the snobocracy of this town! You—you—with your cultivation, and your knowledge of foreign cities, and your friendship with famous people—you, to listen meekly to these provincial nobodies, and have never a word of protest when they presume upon you with their bourgeois prejudices, their empty opinions, and their parochial ideas of precedence and importance and showing off. 'The dear Princesses!' I don't believe any one of them ever saw a Princess, except perhaps on a steamboat on the Caledonian Canal! And you! mother—you—when they are inflating themselves before you—why don't you quietly say to them, 'I saw something of the Princesses when I was Maid of Honour to the Queen; but of course they were much younger then; only they don't forget old friends;' and why don't you take them up to the wall of your own

drawing-room, and point to this water-colour and that water-colour, with their inscriptions, and again you could say, 'You see they don't forget old friends—'"

"Eelin," said the mother, half-laughing (but yet secretly inclined to be just a little bit pleased over the fierce indignation of her champion), "if I were to do anything of that kind, what would it be but self-assertion, and what is self-assertion but the safest and surest mark of the parvenu all over the world?"

"Oh, but, Mummie, you do allow yourself to be jumped on so completely——"

"They might not find themselves so successful if they tried the operation on you, Eelin," the elder woman said, with a smile.

At this the sea-blue black-lashed eyes were opened wide.

"What are you talking about, mother? Me? But I am nobody! I am nobody and nothing. I am like themselves. I am stupid, and ignorant, and provincial, like themselves; they can jump upon me if they choose. But it is you—it is you, mother—when I see their presumption towards you—their thickheaded misunderstanding of your refinement, and your shy ways, and the gracious qualities that just make all the world of a difference between you and them—then my blood boils; and sooner or later——"

"Yes—sooner or later?" said the Bean-an-Tighearn, now laughing outright.

"Sooner or later—when I see them imposing upon you with their affectations, and gentilities, and professions of acquaintance with the fashionable world—well, I will give them a word or two of enlightenment. Yes, I will. I will say to them 'Do you know who my mother is?—do you know who you're talking to?'"

"The grammar, Eelin!"

"The grammar's good enough for them; it's the kind they're used to," she replied, disdainfully. "Although I suppose there isn't one of them who wouldn't pretend to be able to correct your reading of Dante—yes, and give you a few hints about Spanish assonances—or be kind enough to tell you what was the proper way of addressing Her Majesty——"

"And now, my dear Whirlwind," said the slight, silver-haired, gentle-mannered lady, rising from her place, "now

that you have finished your tirade against the highly respectable society of Invernish—not that you know anything whatever about the people, for you won't go near them—"

"I would go near them soon enough if they would treat you with proper consideration!" the girl exclaimed.

"They are very good, kind, generous people—generous to a fault, for they keep sending you invitation after invitation, and you always make some excuse, and I have to go and leave cards for you. But now that your tirade is finished, I suppose you have conclusively proved that you needn't take Agnes with you on your walk up to the Islands. Very well. Only you'd better be off at once. And don't stop talking to Mr. Jameson. And get home well before dusk." And thus it was that when Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave sallied forth from the house, she was alone; and this time she took her way up the river instead of down, making for the Islands that lie in mid-stream. But 'it wasna to meet Duneira's men'—no, nor yet any poet or provost's son. For she was an independent lass, was this one; and held her head right high.

It was about eight o'clock, and the sun had set some twenty minutes before; but in these latitudes there is an abundance of daylight at that hour, in the early part of August. All along the west, over the wooded hills, there reigned a golden afterglow, fair, and peaceful, and serene, that had hardly anywhere a suggestion of cloud; but overhead in the pellucid blue-grey there were a few saffron-tinted flakes, changeless and motionless, their soft and steady fire seeming to say that they could see things unknown to the denizens of this nether world—that they were looking out to the wild conflagration going on among the Coolin peaks, and by the shores of Canna, and Uist, and Barra, and across the flaming waters of the Atlantic to the splendours of the horizon-line. Here, indeed—all around her, as she went on between the open fields and the rowans and alders bordering the river—everything was quiet and tranquil, and inclined to become mystically pale. The glow from the west reflected on the broad bosom of the stream was of a soberer tone; and on the oily surface of the smoothly-swinging current there were myriads of rapid, tremulous threads and streaks and touches of shadow, where the swift-changing ripples caught the opalescent blue

of the zenith. The trees, too, seemed to be darkening somewhat; one could imagine a trace of spectral mist through and behind the heavy masses of foliage. It was daylight, but not day; there was something added—a something indefinite, illusory; in the all-pervading hush and drawing on of the closing hours might not the cries of Little Isabel of the Bannocks come plaintively over from yonder heights?

Well, it was not of Little Isabel of the Bannocks, nor yet of any golden-haired poet who might haunt these solitudes, that Eelin Macdonald was thinking as she left the hither side of the stream, and crossed one small suspension bridge after another, and followed the winding paths under the lofty trees and through the tangled brushwood of each successive island; it was rather of the superlative merits of the embrocation she carried with her in her pocket; and when at length she had reached the Keeper's cottage, and when she had accomplished her mission —in the brisk, common-sense, good-humoured manner she could assume when she chose—then it was, and not till then, that she began to look a little at her surroundings and consider what she should do next. The Islands are very attractive, no doubt; and the Invernishians are properly proud of such an ingenious combination of public park and natural wilderness, of clear brown swirls and eddies under the overhanging hazels and alders, and open and foaming white cataracts where artificial barriers divert the broad rush of the river. But then she had just come round from that direction; and there might be a little variety in going along the other bank, and crossing by the big suspension bridge further down; moreover, there would be ample time for her to get home before dusk; and so, finally, without thought of harm—without definite intention of any kind—she held on her solitary way.

And for her, indeed, it promised to be a sufficiently solitary way. For though she was now facing towards the town, and had in sight about a mile of both banks of the Nish, with the town itself closing in the vista—the towers of the Cathedral, the bridges across the wide water, the scattered houses and gardens, and dominating the whole the lofty Castle-hill with its baronial walls and parapets—and notwithstanding that the peaceful hour might have

been expected to tempt the good folk out from their homes —there were remarkably few people to be seen—only a single figure, or a single couple, here or there in the distance. She recalled that afterwards. It was a rather picturesque scene before her, but it was almost an untenanted one. And this was how the miracle of transformation came to be wrought.

She was passing behind some trees and bushes—about the last of them on this bank—when she suddenly heard one small boy call to another—

"Here, Jock, Jock!—he's got a fesh!"

She could not see the small boys; but (unless one of them was a liar) she knew what had happened; so she instantly pushed her way through the hazel branches and the still more perplexing briars, until she could look out and down upon the broad river. She had anticipated correctly. Some way out, and well over his waist in the water was an elderly man, who, with a flat cap and tassel, might have been taken for a Georgian schoolboy, or, with a diver's helmet, would have looked as if he had just come up from the bottom, so bulgy and capacious were the indiarubber waders that he wore up to his armpits; and the top of his salmon-rod was steadily bent (no curve of beauty invented by any artist of old was ever half so beautiful as that curve); while he himself was struggling to back out of the heavy current, and yet not daring to detach his attention from the line.

"Hold on to him, Fergus!" cried Wild Eelin, jeeringly; for she plainly recognised his predicament.

He must have known her voice, he and Miss Eelin being old and familiar friends; but he paid no heed to her; he did not even turn his head when he had successfully made his way ashore and warsled up on the grass. He had enough to occupy him. Most likely he had been fishing this pool for several days, hour after hour, morning and evening, without getting a single rise to his fly; and now that he had induced one of the coy creatures to accept a Dunkeld, or a Silver Doctor, or a Durham Ranger, he was not going to waste any of his thought on a laughing-eyed, saucy minx who had come along to look over his shoulder, as it were. Especially at the beginning of the fight, when all was as yet uncertainty.

Now it is to be observed that at the opening of these proceedings there were only four spectators—that is to say, the fisherman Fergus Dunn, the daughter of the House of Kinvaig, and two nameless and bare-footed laddies. And the town was a mile away; and it was past eight o'clock; and the surrounding country had appeared deserted. And yet very soon Miss Eelin, who could not help tarrying to witness this silent duel between Fergus and the fish, became vaguely conscious that several people had congregated around her—behind her on the grassy bank and up on the gravelled pathway; and every yard or two that the salmon retreated down the river, this unknown concourse, mysteriously augmenting itself every moment, also moved forward. At first she gave the scattered crowd no heed, because it was mostly invisible to her, and all her attention was concentrated on the point where the line touched the water; but presently this ever-increasing assemblage had extended up and down until it seemed to encompass the fisherman and his young companion. Whence and whither had these people come, then, on this still, voiceless, vacant evening? Had they sprung out of the bowels of the earth?

There was a boil on the surface of the current: *Boom!* went a murmur of excitement through the mass of spectators. And yet truly this was but a poor-spirited fish; it would not show any kind of fight; it merely sulked at the bottom from time to time, and then again it would fall down with the stream, making it a matter of calculation as to how long it would take to reach the sea.

"A sluggish one, that, Fergus," said the girl who was following him step by step.

"Beggars maunna be choosers, Miss Eelin," responded her friend; salmon of any kind being prized in these waters.

And meanwhile the small multitude, that had doubtless been perceived from the Castle-hill, had grown with incredible rapidity to a great multitude—old men and young, lasses and lads, message-boys, grave townsfolk, strangers in tourist attire: why, even the nurses at the Infirmary opposite had come flying across the garden to peer through the railings at the unwonted turmoil. All along the banks and out on to the suspension bridge these eager swarms of

folk clustered, with eyes glowering through the gathering dusk at the oily breadth of river; it was a nervous crowd, expectant, quick to answer and warn and assert among its composite members; while even the dogs had become quite excited by the general ferment, and were careering hither and thither, yelping and barking. Then every newcomer—every unit added to the dense accumulation—had to be informed; and had plenty of informants.

"It's only a sea-trout!" said one, contemptuously. He was a fool.

"It's a twenty-pounder—I saw him maself when he jumped out of the watter!" another maintained, thinking to gain importance. He was a liar.

"There's no half enough strain on the line!" said a third. He was a critic—and a fool and a liar all combined.

"Teach your grandmother! There's not a better fisherman than Fergus Dunn in the whole of Invernish-shire!"

"Keep out o' the way there, you laddies!"

"Haud back—haud back! Gie the man a chance!"

"I'm sayin', will naebody ca' in they d——d dogs!" This outburst of righteous indignation was addressed to the crowd at large, by an irate old carter who appeared to have gone half out of his mind with sympathetic anxiety.

"Ah—ah! Look—look! There—there—there!"—a thousand exclamations broke forth simultaneously when twice the sluggish salmon rolled over and showed itself on the surface; and then there was an all-absorbing scrutiny to see that the line still held.

It was the strangest spectacle—none stranger of its kind could be found anywhere else in the Queen's dominions: the wan twilight gradually coming over the castled hill, and the town, and the hanging woods, but leaving the wide stream of a curious metallic hue; the dark assemblage, slow-moving and murmuring; the nucleus of this nebulous gathering a little elderly man who was being steadily drawn down to the sea by a stubborn fish, his companion a young girl who was either carried on, step by step, by the keenness of her interest in the struggle, or who was too proud to acknowledge the existence of this great concourse surrounding her. Then came the thrilling moment of the bridge; and when old Fergus was seen to descend into the water

again, to follow the fish underneath, there were further exclamations.

"The man'll drown himself!"

"He canna hold back against that wecht o' watter!"

"He'll be into a hole!"

"Ach away! He kens every stone on the bottom as well's he kens the High-street!"

"He canna follow—it's no possible!"

Indeed it seemed a perilous exploit; for the river was high; and here the confined current charged furiously through; but Fergus, cautiously groping with foot after foot, made on and on, until the mass of spectators over his head had to rush from one side of the bridge to the other. And still the tackle held; and still the obdurate salmon, trusting solely to the weight of the stream, and not tiring itself by any dramatic flourishes, kept retreating and retreating; and still the mystical twilight deepened all around, until here and there, through the gardens of the adjacent villas, the golden star of some newly-lit lamp trembled and gleamed.

As for Wild Eelin, forgetful of time, place, and circumstances, the overpowering fascination of the pursuit held her captive; and old Fergus, who had returned to the bank after getting underneath the bridge, addressed to her a word now and again, as if assuming she would not desert him, but see out this adventure to the end. Besides, there was an indescribable glamour, witchery, diablerie about the scene all around her, now that the darkness was closing down; the sombre, half-silent assemblage seemed a phantasmal kind of thing; the spectral light on the water appeared to come from no earthly source.

Of a sudden there was a low cry from the crowd; the fish had shown itself again—even through that ashen glare on the surface of the current.

"The white feather at last!"

"Dod, he'd better take care: Fergus Dunn's efter 'm!"

"The dour deevil—he'll be off yet!"

And again he showed—this time sailing somewhat nearer the bank. Fergus took a firm stand, reeling up tight. By this time they were all of them down in the suburbs of Invernish, and servants at attic windows and their mistresses at front doors were straining their eyes out into the dusk,

wondering at the tumult. At length, and unexpectedly, Fergus turned to his companion.

"Will ye take the rod now, Miss Eelin?"

There was hardly any opportunity for hesitation, and she was a fearless kind of creature: the next second she had got the rod in her left hand, and the fingers of her right hand on the reel; while old Fergus was creeping and crouching down by the water-side, with a formidable steel instrument in his grip. The hum of the people had almost ceased: they seemed to dread lest their talking—their very breathing—might work some mischief. Inch after inch Fergus crawled along; Eelin was putting on all the strain she dared; then there was a gradual giving in and giving in—her fingers busy with the reel as if her very life depended on it: finally came a quick stroke of the gaff, and the next moment the fish, in the fading light, was seen to be safe on the bank. The whole multitude seemed to give one sigh of relief and satisfaction, and the pent-up flood of excited talk broke loose, each man turning to his neighbour with a triumphant look, as if he himself had been through the long contest and come out the happy victor.

And now, for Miss Eelin, arrived the reaction. When she had surrendered the rod, and bade good-night to Fergus, she turned to set out for home, and the crowd courteously made way for her to pass. She went back to the suspension-bridge, which was now almost empty; she crossed over to the other side, and then she sped away like a ghost through the crepuscular gloom. There was no longer any intoxicating eagerness of interest, no proud disregard of bystanders, no wilful self-reliance. A certain chilliness of reflection had supervened. There was an ominous question occupying her mind and momentarily assuming larger dimensions; and the question was this—What would the shy, gentle-natured, decorous Bean-an-Tighearn think when told that her daughter Eelin had acted as gillie for an old fisherman, in full view of the assembled populace of Invernish, to say nothing of the hotel-tourists from the south? Nay, Eelin herself could now recall (with a burning forehead) that at the very moment she took the rod from old Fergus she distinctly heard one English stranger say to his companion "Why, it's better than a theatre!" She would have liked to kill that man.

Now amongst those who had made way to let her go through the crowd was a rather good-looking young fellow —tall, fair-haired, with refined features, and somewhat timid grey eyes—who seemed considerably struck by her appearance. He was daring enough—in the dim half-darkness no one could notice him—to let his regard follow her while she remained in sight. And then he turned to his neighbour—who was waiting to see the ten-pounder tied head and tail.

"Do you know who that young lady was?" he ventured to ask.

The lad—who looked like a tradesman's messenger, and doubtless was acquainted with everybody—stared at his confession of ignorance.

"That?" said he. "That was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig!"

CHAPTER V.

A CAGED LINNET.

NEXT morning this same young man, Archibald Gilchrist by name, was up and out of bed by four o'clock; he was at that time of life when a youth of eager temperament and restless if vague ambition grudges every hour lost in sleep. When he had dressed in his tiny room he opened a trap-door and let himself down to the parlour below: these two apartments were all that pertained to a small, thatched toy-cottage standing in a little bit of garden in the northern outskirts of the town. His breakfast, consisting of a tumbler of milk and a farle of oatcake, stood on the table; but then his breakfast-hour was nine; and meanwhile, as with him prudence and forethought were not so much a virtue as a necessity, he carefully broke off not more than a couple of inches of the oatcake and allowed himself about a tablespoonful of the milk. Then he put a Latin grammar in one pocket, and a Latin dictionary in another, and, with a thin volume of Horace's Odes in his hand, he donned his cap and went out.

He had the wide, silent, solitary world wholly to himself; not a living creature was astir. When he followed along the river-side and passed the main thoroughfare leading into the town, the grey streets were empty and voiceless; and when he continued on his way through the southern suburbs into the country, not a dog barked, not even a bird chirped in the hedges. And yet the day was not so far distant. In the eastern heavens the heavy swathes of rose-purple cloud, lying motionless in seas of gold and silver, spoke of the coming of the dawn; the wooded hills

were slowly declaring themselves in their hues of deep olive-green; and the broad river had now become a deep pearly grey, with quivering and swift-recurring streaks of shadow on its luminous surface. Here was the very spot where, on the previous night, the concourse of people had crowded round the old fisherman; yonder was the suspension-bridge over which the girl with the strange, dark-blue, black-lashed eyes had vanished into the dusk. Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig? It was a proud name. It seemed at once to take her away into an unapproachable region, forbidden even to the caprices of a wandering fancy.

Nor was there much room for any such idle fancy amid the stress and storm of this young man's life, its straitened means and circumstances, its immediate and imperative demands. As yet his future was all a chaos before him; but it was a chaos that kept calling to him; and his answer was a sort of perfervid confusion of unsystematised energy, apparently without any definite and practical aim. These blind impulses towards incessant self-improvement, towards the acquisition of all possible knowledge: whither did they lead? Here he was hammering away at Horace; but it was with no thought of becoming a schoolmaster. His rare holidays he devoted to geologising among the hills; but it was with no hope of winning the Wollaston Medal or of sharing the proceeds of the Murchison Fund. He had taught himself at least the elementary principles of navigation; but it was with no intention of competing for the post of master mariner. Weltering in the quagmire of German metaphysics: what contribution to the *res angusta domi* could be got out of that? No doubt his patient and loving study of English literature, especially of English and Scotch poetry, and his ceaseless searching after purity of style, may have helped him a little in his own poor contributions to the Invernish *Observer;* but for these casual essays in prose and verse he was not paid, nor did they promise to lead to anything substantive. And in the meantime, amid all this perplexity of occupations and pressing on towards some unknown goal, his actual and ostensible employment was that of cashier and bookkeeper to Mr. John Struthers, draper and general outfitter, Union-street — a taskmaster who exercised a

perfectly devilish ingenuity in the torturing of his subordinates.

The new day opened over hill and field and stream; an occasional distant sound told of awakening life; and a number of guillemots, that had come circling and sailing in from the Beauly Firth, were now splashing and dipping in the shallow backwaters, or preening their wings on a long promontory of pink-hued gravel. By this time he had reached the Islands, and had seated himself on a bench there; behind him a wilderness of underwood, overhead the spreading branches of elm and lime and sycamore, in front of him the wide current swinging and racing on its way to the sea. And he was getting on fairly well with Lib. I. Carm XXV., and his little pencilled annotations and conjectural renderings. The first few verses he had picked out with longs and shorts, and Epichoriambic Trimeter Catalectic he had pronounced them in the margin. Then came *Me tuo longas pereunte noctes*, with a caret between *tuo* and *longas*, and (*amante*) written at the side. Then came 'O, are ye sleeping, Lydia?' which may be regarded as a somewhat liberal interpretation of *Lydia, dormis?* And then again, 'You, an old woman—lightly-clad?—or lightly-esteemed?—will weep for—': thus he toiled on, hunting out the hidden verbs, and piecing the phrases together until he had got something like an intelligible whole. Of course he used no cribs; it was not to please or pacify any examiner that he had undertaken this work; it was because the hunger of acquisition that governed him had decreed it to be necessary he should read Horace in the original. But why?—towards what end? He could not have answered the question—except, perhaps, by the confession that there was a poor old widow, living up Dingwall way, who expected great things of her only son, and that Latin, as one of many weapons, might turn out to be of use to him in the warfare of life to which he was (not timorously) looking forward.

The day widened and became more and more resplendent; the guillemots, having finished their morning bath, had flown away in quest of breakfast; old Fergus had come along to fish the Islands Pool (the happy mortal, whose labour was all in the open air and all a pastime!); and now the tall, flaxen-haired, absent-eyed student shut up his

books, and turned his face towards the town. It was half-past six, and about time for him to enter into slavery.

First of all he had to go to Mr. Struthers's house for the keys; then he went to Union-street and opened the back premises to give ingress, at seven o'clock, to the workmen, who descended into what they called the glory-hole; then an old woman appeared, to sweep up; and then he betook himself to his desk—which was in a partitioned-off corner dimly lit by a semi-opaque window—there to tackle books and accounts. It was a depressing task; for these were all hopelessly in arrear; and no wonder, seeing that he had the duties of four people thrust upon his shoulders; nevertheless he struggled along, though every now and again some sudden and radiant flash of colour would strike through this grey twilight—some vivid recollection of rambles on the slopes of Scuir Vuillin or by the winding shores of the Dornoch Firth. At eight o'clock the young men arrived, to take down the shutters and get ready for the day's work; and soon thereafter came the girl-assistants, to dress the windows and make other preparations, on their side of the shop. Nine o'clock brought him a brief respite, for then he hurried away home for breakfast; but most of this interval was devoted to practising with Indian clubs and dumb-bells, so that he had barely time to swallow the milk and oatcake before setting out again. And at ten o'clock, back in Union-street, the dreary servitude was resumed, though now with a new feature added.

For in this establishment a clever piece of mechanism had been rigged up by which, when a sale had been effected at either of the counters, and the bill and the money placed in a little tin box, the box could be run along a pair of tiny rails until it finally descended upon the cashier's desk, who then receipted the bill and returned it by the same means. So that when a certain flaxen-haired dreamer was patiently if hopelessly trying to attack the arrears of day-book and ledger—or perchance surreptitiously wrestling with the intricacies of "Ad Laelium Lamiam"—or perchance (for a lad's fancies, despite of storm and stress, will sometimes flame and burn with poetic fire) recalling the rose-leaf curve of a young girl's profile, or the strange, unnerving, unintentional glance of a pair of long-lashed eyes—then a sudden Kr-r-r-r-r would startle him out of his reverie, and

he would be called upon to deal, promptly and accurately, with some such problem as this—

Served by 4.	*Examined by E.T.*
Boy's Hose	£0 2 8
Necktie	0 1 6
10*s.*	4 2

Whereupon he would have to test the half-sovereign; stamp the bill; count out the 5*s.* 10*d.* change; and by the time the tin box was on its return journey, what had become of his vision of a magical summer evening and of a rosebud maiden in her teens? And here was the little, acrid, red-headed Struthers, storming, scolding, and insulting every one all round, as soon as the place was clear of customers; but the moment that another one appeared at the door, then he was all sycophantic blandness, with a deferential smile, a bent back, and hand washing hand in invisible water. And thus the dismal, interminable, inexorable hours went on; and the wild heart of imprisoned youth beat against its barriers in vain.

But as it turned out this day was to be a day of days; into the dreary, mechanical, soul-sickening round there leapt a sudden wonder. When at two o'clock he hastened off homeward for the scrimp meal that served him in lieu of dinner, he found lying on the table an envelope, the handwriting on which he instantly recognised; it was handwriting always of the fullest import to him—it was that of the sub-editor of the Invernish *Observer*. This was the message:—

'Dear Sir,

'There are a good many geological terms in your paper of this week. If you would care to glance over a proof, you might look in any time in the course of the evening. And then I should also have the pleasure of making your acquaintance.

'Yours faithfully,

'Thomas Grieve.'

Why, it was like a recruit's call to arms! He had never been within the mysterious precincts of a newspaper office; he had never met face-to-face this all-powerful person, who could confer prominence or obscurity, who could advise

and amend, and even reject at will; he had never even beheld, much less been asked to tackle, that entrancingly interesting thing, a proof. Hitherto he had been a mere outsider, timidly and rather shamefacedly dropping his contributions into the letter-box, and sneaking off in anxious uncertainty as to their fate. But that he should be invited to come inside, and take his place, in however humble a fashion, among the small band of folk who had made the Invernish *Observer* the chief literary paper of the north of Scotland, that seemed to be opening a new world for him altogether, a world with quite limitless possibilities. All that afternoon it is to be feared that day-book and ledger received but perfunctory attention; and that the accursed *Kr-r-r-r-r* of the tin box broke in upon many a far-reaching fantasy.

The moment that eight o'clock gave him final release from the long and monotonous labours of the day he betook himself to the *Observer* office, a somewhat dingy little building in a side-lane leading down to the river. He was very nervous. Twice or thrice he walked up and down the pavement, passing and re-passing the door, without finding the courage to enter; and when at last he did go in, and when a small boy undertook to show him Mr. Grieve's room, he followed in a blind and half-bewildered kind of fashion. He only knew that there were sombre stairs; and a strange, all-pervading odour—which in after days, when he knew it to be the odour of printers' ink, grew to have a mystic enchantment for him; and a hollow rumbling of machinery, which spoke of some portion of the paper already going to press. And then, and unexpectedly, he found himself in a square, low-roofed, rudely-furnished apartment, that was all littered with newspapers, and magazines, and books of reference; while before him, and welcoming him with a sort of bluff good-nature, was a middle-aged heavily-built, bilious-complexioned man whose beady black eyes scanned the new comer in no unfriendly way.

"Sit down, and I'll send for your proof," said the sub-editor. "But let's have a better look at ye, man!" He stepped back a pace, and surveyed Gilchrist from head to foot. "Ay, you're well set up for hill work. Are these stories you tell about your tramps in the mountains 'bona feedy,' or just wi' a little bit spice of romance in them?"

"They're as true as I can make them," Gilchrist answered, rather apprehensively. "But—but hill distances have often to be guessed—and then—I get very few holidays, and I have to crowd as much as I can into each one of them. I hope you don't think——"

"Oh, it's all right—it's all right," said the other; and then he turned to a speaking tube, and whistled down it, and called for a proof of the article on 'The Parallel Roads of Glen Roy.' In a minute or two Archie Gilchrist was seated at the table, a long, damp slip of paper in front of him, and a pen in his not too steady fingers, while he was trying to bring his excited brain to work on sentence after sentence, and that with a trembling consciousness of not knowing how to mark the errors when he should come to them. Fortunately for him, there did not happen to be a single blunder in the whole of the column—which of itself may be taken as conclusive evidence that the age of miracles is not yet past.

When the blameless proof had been returned, Tom Grieve looked at his watch.

"I've got a quarter of an hour," he said. "What say ye to stepping up the road to Peter Macindo's for a smoke and a crack?"

Here were more marvels! Gilchrist could hardly believe that he was asked to go hob-nobbing with the man who was practically editor of the famous literary organ of the north (for the editor and proprietor, Dr. Gillespie, did not interfere very much); but of course he gladly and eagerly assented; whereupon they passed out and through the dusk; and made their way to an old-fashioned, gas-lit tavern; and secured a little, odd, solitary box of a place where, after the briefest delay, Grieve had a large tumbler of frothing stout on the table before him, while Archie Gilchrist—who was neither smoker nor drinker, but nevertheless had to join in with the spirit of so great an occasion—contented himself with a modest glass of ale.

"So you're in Struthers's place in Union-street," said Grieve, as he lit his pipe. "Seven in the morning till eight in the evening? Desperate hours—just murderous. Where do you get time for all those various pursuits of yours?"

"I'm generally up at four—and seldom in bed before

twelve," was the simple answer: he was not in the habit of whining over his condition in life.

"And all day occupied with your clerk-work. Prosaic surroundings—"

"Yes, indeed," interposed Gilchrist, with something of an ingenuous blush appearing in his pale features. "I suppose you'll be saying I should stick to my last."

"Nothing of the sort," rejoined this bilious-hued man, who seemed a kindly and considerate person, notwithstanding the occasional sarcastic twinkle in his small black eyes. "Certainly not. What would Scottish literature be but for the tribe of singers who have sung in the most untoward circumstances? Allan Ramsay was a barber—Fergusson, a lawyer's clerk—Burns, a ploughman—Hogg, a shepherd—Alexander Wilson, a travelling packman—Allan Cunningham, a stone-mason—poor, ill-fated Tannahill, a weaver. There's no doubt that making up accounts in a draper's shop hardly sounds poetical—maybe it's not a congenial employment; but you've had predecessors, my lad; Robert Gilfillan—and are there any verses that get nearer to the heart of the Scotch peasantry than 'O why left I my hame'? —Gilfillan was shopman to a grocer in Dunfermline. And then if it's encouragement ye want, remember you're living a dual life; you're connected with the newspaper world; and there has always been plenty of poetry about the Scotch newspaper offices. John Mayne—and 'Logan Braes' might well have been written by Burns—Mayne was a compositor; Richard Gall was another—in the *Edinburgh Courant;* Alexander Rodger was the sub-editor of the *Reformer's Gazette;* and William Motherwell—poor Motherwell—only thirty-eight—but he could not have bettered 'Jeanie Morrison' if he had lived to be a hundred—Motherwell was editor of the *Glasgow Courier*. And why should I not add in our own Doctor?" he continued between the meditative pulls at his pipe. "The Doctor's well fitted to take his stand in that goodly company; though perhaps I say it who shouldn't; for most of his pieces have appeared from time to time in the *Invernish Observer:* and it's ill work praising one's own household. But this was what I was driving at: don't you get imagining that there is anything incompatible between your daily work and your literary enterprises. Not at all. The mind of a man is free,

whatever mechanical task his hand may be at. And the doors of Westminster Abbey won't ask whether you were ever behind a counter or not."

He took a long draught of the stout; and resumed in a very different key.

"Well," said he, with a sardonic grin, "this week at least there's nothing in your paper that 'White Cockade' is likely to be after you for; she lets you have full swing when you keep to your geological theories. But she can give you a rare good skelp when she wants——"

"And when it is deserved, I dare say," Gilchrist put in, with a bit of a laugh.

"It's well for you you can address her from behind the columns of a newspaper," the sub-editor went on, with a certain significance. "I'm thinking, if you were to meet her real self, you would not be quite so bold in your advances——"

"I hope," said Gilchrist, quickly and anxiously, "that there's no risk of misunderstanding. The assumption is that these two people who answer each other in the *Observer* are quite imaginary."

"That's as it may be," responded Grieve, without committing himself. "There are a good many personal opinions—prejudices, I should say—dragged in. And you two seem to be in antagonism on every possible point. When you fire off at her

> 'There's nae Renwick now, lassie,
> There's nae gude Cargill,
> Nor holy Sabbath preaching
> Upon the Martyrs' Hill.'

then she waps back at you with

> 'Fill a glass to the heroes whose swords kept us free,
> Right descendants of Wallace, Montrose, and Dundee!'

And she's smart—she's smart. You generally come off second-best in these skirmishes, when you provoke her with your whiggery—the fierce young Jacobite that she is! She's too clever for you, Gilchrist, and that's the fact. Even when she's in the wrong she gets the better of you through her devil-may-carishness, her audacity, her jeering and jesting."

"Might one be allowed," said Gilchrist, with some diffidence, "to ask who she is—her real name?"

"It is allowed to ask; it is not allowed to answer," replied the sub-editor, promptly. "That is one of the fundamental statutes of the office. Though if she were to demand to know who you were, it might be difficult to refuse her: she's an imperious young lady."

He glanced at his watch.

"Time's up. By the way," he said, as they proceeded to quit this snug howf on their return to the *Observer* lane, "have you any idea as to what your screed of next week is to be about?"

"Not quite yet," was the answer, "but I thought of introducing somehow a sketch of a very striking scene I saw yesterday evening—the capture of a salmon in the Islands Pool—or rather below the suspension-bridge—with the whole town of Invernish looking on. Very singular and very picturesque, especially towards the end, for the chief actor was a young lady—a Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig—"

"Who?" said the sub-editor, suddenly.

"A Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig, I was told," Gilchrist proceeded, in a wholly unconcerned fashion. "I presume she belongs to the Kinvaig Macdonalds of Glengarva. A very distinguished-looking girl—very—extremely so; but what struck me most, I think, was her mastery of the situation, her air of quiet self-possession, a kind of proud indifference to the presence of the crowd. I suppose there would be no harm in my bringing her into my sketch——"

"What?" exclaimed the sub-editor, inadvertently, and for a second he turned to 'glower' in amazement at his companion, here in the dusky thoroughfare.

"Oh, but naming no names, of course," said Gilchrist, hastily. "I would do it with discretion, I hope. Only—the figure of the girl—alone—with the great crowd behind her—it was all so picturesque—"

"Yes," said the sub-editor, at the door of the office, "and if that is your subject for next week, send in the article in good time, for I think I may have to keep an eye on the proof. Good-night!"

They shook hands and parted; and now, already, as Archie Gilchrist went away home through the transparent

dark, his brain was busy coining phrases for his next week's contribution. He thought it might interest the Invernish folk. He would hold up a mirror in front of that nebulous, black, murmuring multitude swarming along the river-bank, and show them what they looked like. And surely a guarded reference to the young lady could not be taken amiss? She was the heroine of the whole affair: it would lose three-fourths of its interest if she were left out. Of course, he dared not say much; for she appeared to be well-known in the town; and the occasion would be recognised. He reflected that some of those rustic poets whom Grieve had been talking about would have been less scrupulous; they lived in days when rhymesters had a freer hand; they would at once have made the bold avowal that they had gone "a waefu' gate yestreen," and got their death

> "frae twa sweet een,
> Twa lovely een o' bonnie blue."

But the modern young lady does not care for compliments of the kind; nor does she wish to have it hinted to her, in the columns of a weekly paper, that here or there in the nameless crowd surrounding her she may possess an undeclared and bashful lover.

CHAPTER VI.

'THE GLEN'S MINE!'

When old Allan Macdonald and his son Somerled were ushered into the drawing-room of the dwelling, just outside Invernish, that had for sentiment's sake been named Glengarva, the maidservant informed them that her mistress was out cutting some flowers but would be with them presently. Whereupon the younger man, placing a touch of guidance on his father's elbow, said—

"Here is a chair for you, father."

But the white-bearded blind giant remained erect.

"In this house," he said, "I cannot be seated until I am bidden to be seated by the Bean-an-Tighearn herself."

His son laughed.

"You are giving your chieftainess the attributes of royalty," he said.

"In my regard she has these, and more," the older man answered. "Ay, and her daughter too. Indeed, I should not be surprised if it is the daughter—the daughter of our chief—that most of them will be asking about when we go out west again. And you have eyes, lad; use them; carry your report; there's many a one will thank you; and if you get a chance you must tell her—for I am not good at saying such things—you must tell her—well, I do not know how to put it—but tell her—tell the young lady—that the hearts of the people over there grow warm within them—warm with loyalty and affection—when they think of the daughter of their chief—ay, the daughter of their chief—tell her that, laddie. She little knows—she cannot know—she is a young thing—how those people regard her—how eager they will be to hear of her. You must tell her, Somerled—you must tell her."

He seemed nervous and excited; there was even a tremor in his voice. And then he said impatiently—

"Well, what about the house? A fine house—a noble house, I hope."

"Oh, no, it isn't anything of the kind," his son replied. "Quite an ordinary kind of house. But the surroundings are beautiful—a beautiful garden—in this room there's an embrasure, with three windows, all open—and they look out on the flower-plots and the tennis-lawn, and you get a glimpse of the river too, through the lime-trees. There's a splendid araucaria. And a fine acacia, too—though the blossom's gone. The flower-plots are simply a blaze of colour in the sunlight; there's yellow calceolarias, and scarlet geraniums, and orange-red nasturtiums, and black pansies—well, nearly black—you might call them black—and crimson snapdragon, and then above them all are the tall spikes of gladiolus like spears of flame. Yes, and round each plot a border of blue lobelia. Everything very bright and brilliant, because it is so bright and brilliant a morning, you know; and the glimpses of the river are like silver through the green branches of the limes. Very quiet and still—you might be hundreds of miles away from a town——"

He was startled into silence. For of a sudden there stole into the tranquil air the tinkling chords of a harp—hushed and muffled, like the falling of drops of water into a fountain, and yet strangely near; and strangely near also—just outside the open windows apparently—was the sound of a girl's singing, every syllable of which they could hear distinctly:

O fair shines the sun upon Huntly's green shaw;
And the mavis and the merlie are singing;
And blithe is the bride as she steps through the ha',
And a' the kirk bells they are ringing.
An' ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond!

Thus she sang; and doubtless it was the fancy that she was entirely alone and unheard that led the singer to give an excess and abandonment of pathos to her notes:

O Willie, Love Willie, it is dark by the shore,
Through the mirk the white moon-clouds are flying;
Far out by Kilbranda the black waves roar,
And I hear the wild kelpie crying.
O ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond!

And again she sang—in the all-pervading silence—

A kiss, but ae kiss frae the bonnie, bonnie bride,
Ay, a kiss for me that's broken-hearted;
And never a word, Love Willie, ne'er a word
O' the night that you and me parted.
An' ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond!

Now there are some tones in a woman's voice that (perhaps heard only once in a lifetime) go straight to a man's innermost soul, and work strange doings there: they are a cry to him—a cry and a summons to the very depths of his being—a cry to which his whole nature must passionately respond. What could Eelin Macdonald—out there in the summer-house—in her little bower of honeysuckle and white roses—and fingering away at her harp—what could she know of the message that the still air was carrying? Perhaps the tragic piteousness of her voice was only a girlish amusement—an occupation—an exercise even. But it altered the whole course of a strong man's life.

Presently the Bean-an-Tighearn came into the room, with many apologies, in her sweet-spoken way, for having kept her visitors waiting; and now it was that the older Macdonald tried to make the speech that he had carefully prepared. But he was considerably agitated; and did not get on very well.

"Madam," said he, "I hope you will understand that we are sensible of the high honour you have conferred on us this day. The kindness of your letter overwhelmed me. When I was a young lad in Glengarva—how could I have looked forward—to being received by you—and—and——"

"But who should be more welcome in this house," said the gentle-voiced lady, "than you and your son? The Macdonalds of Kinvaig are not a heartless race; they have

some sense of gratitude; and they know what you have done for the strath. Indeed, I wish my daughter had been at home—she has plenty of talk—she could have told you what we all of us owe you—but I'm afraid she has gone into the town——"

"There was some one singing in the garden a minute ago," said Somerled Macdonald (his heart still thrilling and answering, as it were, to the strange message). "I made so bold as to guess——"

"In the garden?" said the Bean-an-Tighearn. "Oh, then, that must be Eelin!" She went to the open window. "Eelin!" she called. "Eelin, are you there? Eelin!"

In about a couple of minutes the drawing-room door was again opened, and there entered a young girl—a deep indigo Tam o' Shanter on her bunched black hair—who appeared taller than she really was, by reason of her frank gait and a certain boyish audacity of look. 'Who are you?' the dark blue eyes asked fearlessly enough; and the set of her head was proud; and it might almost be said that there was a kind of challenge in her manner. That first attitude of hers did not last very long. For no sooner did she come to perceive, in the course of conversation, the extreme and exaggerated deference that the two strangers paid to her mother than she instantly changed towards them, and nothing could exceed her kindness, and sweetness, and courtesy. To the older man especially she was particularly attentive; and yet in an outspoken, laughing way that seemed to have for him a singular interest and charm. He reached out his trembling fingers, and sought her hand, and held it for a moment or two.

"I am told you are a very beautiful young lady," he said, "though I can never hope to see you. Ay, there's many a Macdonald in Ontario has your portrait—every household of them, I should think; for when her ladyship was so kind as to send out your photograph—well, they were not to be restrained; they just took it from me and would not give it back till there were copies and enlargements made, and now in every house the Daughter of the Chief has the place of honour—who else, indeed? Ay, and that is what I hear all of them say; and about the Highland character of your features; only—well, you must forgive me—and her

ladyship will forgive the liberty—only, I am almost wishing that you had been a boy—"

"Oh, but I'm with you there!" she exclaimed, with reckless candour. "Of course I wish I had been born a boy! Shouldn't I have held my head up—yes, and turned out my toes—and every step would have said 'The Glen's Mine!'"

"That you never could have said, Eelin," the mother put in, smiling, "whether you were boy or girl."

It was well that none of them chanced to be looking at Somerled Macdonald: he had grown pale, even to the lips.

"Ah, but, by God, she may say it yet," he was whispering to himself; for he had been sore wounded by the beauty of this maiden, and her brave ways, and the pathetic cry in her voice when she was singing in the summer-house; so that there was a kind of delirium in his brain.

And perhaps he did not quite know what happened to him thereafter during this interview; for he was busy with a far-reaching project; and when at length he and his father found themselves out in the open again—on their way to the Islands—he neglected his usual habit of describing, for the benefit of the blind man, such objects as they might be passing. At last they came to a well, of which old Allan Macdonald had recollection, because of the famous sweetness of the water; and here he stopped to have a drink; and now it was that the younger of the two disclosed his thoughts.

"Look here, father," said he, abruptly—and there was a sort of glow of passionate enterprise in the usually quiet and thoughtful features, "What's the use of one's life unless one can do something fine with it? Well, you had your chance—you founded the Canadian Kinvaig. Why shouldn't I have my chance? All that I want left to me is the use of my fists and my head on my shoulders: I can fend for myself. But I have a considerable fortune, as you know: why shouldn't I do something fine with it? The ordinary course of human life is a humdrum, tawdry kind of thing. When I get my chance, why shouldn't I do something worth while with the money I happen to have?"

"What on earth are you talking about, Lad?" his father said, in the midst of these rapid utterances.

"Well, if it's possible—if it's possible, and if I have

enough, I am thinking of buying the Glengarva strath, or as much of it as may be necessary, and handing it over to the daughter of your chieftainess, so that the Macdonalds of Kinvaig may come to their own again."

"Bless me, man, are you off your head!" the father cried, standing stock still. "What's happened to you? Has she bewitched you? There's many a one has told me she was a splendid-looking creature: but surely she has not produced a midsummer madness? Oh, I recognise that it is a grand idea; but it's madness; midsummer madness! What glamour has she put over ye?—what witchcraft?"

"And wouldn't you like to see the Bean-an-Tighearn established in the old house?" the son demanded. "And the glen swept clean of all that scum? And if I wanted a few thousands to complete the purchase, I know the very man I should apply to—and that's yourself!"

"It's madness, Somerled," the father repeated, but with less force of conviction; perhaps there was something captivating about this wild scheme; and blind eyes can see visions. "Even if Sir Charles Orme would part with the place; and if those Mountmahon people would give up their tenancy; and if you were content to surrender everything you've got, and start life again as a poor man—why, how do you know she would accept her share in the arrangement? For of course I'm talking of the girl. And this seems a mad way, a frantic way, of trying to win her favour!"

"And do you imagine, father," said the son, in his brief, explicit habit of speech, "that if I were able to buy back Kinvaig, and hand it over to the daughter of the race, she would ever learn from whom it came? No, I think that is not likely! There would have to be some other way. I have no thought of winning her favour; no, nor even expecting a word of thanks. I know my place; I understand hers. And if it is a madness to make a sacrifice on the altar of clanship, I fancy you should be able to guess who brought me up in that faith."

"Somerled Macdonald," said the old man, "do not you attempt to deceive me. There was no sentimental dream of this kind in your head when you sailed from Quebec. Nor was there yesterday. It was this morning that did it; and it was this girl who did it—no religion of clanship

or anything of the kind. And yet it is a grand idea—the Macdonalds of Kinvaig in their old home! A splendid idea!—why, man, if there was a public subscription, out there amongst the Macdonalds in the west, it would go like wildfire. But—but—there's sense in what you say: when the one person has the opportunity to do something fine: only, you see, Lad, if I am responsible for bringing you up with these romantic traditions of loyalty, you must let me stand in. Ah, but you must! Could I sleep in my bed, if I missed such a chance? And yet I have not been bedazzled out of my wits by the bright eyes of that lass. God help us all, to think I shall never see her! But I heard her, Lad; I heard her laughing, and the delightfulness of her way of talk. The old family back again in Glengarva! That's it, is it? Well, I'm in with you; I can have but a few years left to me now; and at night I shall rest all the better for thinking and thinking that we have done a good thing. Ah, and about telling them—I am not so sure—I am not so sure I could forego that. When it is all settled I would like to be there; and get a shake of the young lady's hand: and the Bean-an-Tighearn might say 'Thank you!'—in the sweetest voice that God ever gave to a woman."

"You may tell them it was all your doing," Somerled Macdonald said. "I do not wish to win any favour."

"All my doing? Am I a thief, then, to steal another man's credit from him?" he made answer. And again he went on, in a sort of stupor of rapt contemplation: "The old family of Kinvaig back in Glengarva!—by the Eagle's Crag, that is something to stir the blood!—ay, and to stir the blood of many a one across the seas!"

By this time they had resumed their stroll—passing over the small suspension-bridges and following the winding paths through the Islands. Of a sudden old Allan Macdonald again stopped short.

"Somerled," said he, "are you trying to make a fool of me, at my age? Why, man, the whole idea is not practical or possible!—it doesn't come into the nature of things—it's a dream—splendid enough—grand enough—the Kinvaig family back in their old home!—ay, ay, splendid enough—but not feasible—not feasible. Are we men, or are we two great big babies—infants crying for the moon? You that

are called the railway king—at the height of a great career—to think of your beginning your life all over again—giving everything you possess to a girl—even though she is the daughter of the House of Kinvaig—and even though you drank in loyalty and devotion to that House with your mother's milk—it's a splendid dream, as I say, but it's not within the limits of common sense——"

"And yet it might happen," said Somerled Macdonald, absently. And as they went on again, his resolute and refined features had grown pensive and even wistful: perhaps he was thinking back—thinking back to the thrill of a girl's voice, and to the straightforward, honest, good-comrade stare of a pair of bewildering deep-blue eyes.

And meanwhile what of Wild Eelin herself? Well, she had fetched her hat and gloves into the drawing-room, and had thrown aside the blue Tam o' Shanter that had partially imprisoned the thick masses of her raven-black hair: this was a signal that she was going into the town.

"Mother," she said, as she stood tiptoe at the mirror, "those two Canadians are gentlemen."

"They are of Highland blood, Eelin," responded the elder woman, quietly.

"And we ought to show them every civility while they are in Invernish. Maxwell must make up a basket of fruit and flowers, and I will carry it myself to the old gentleman, at his hotel. As for the young one, he did not bestow much notice on me: but his manner to you, mother—perhaps you did not notice it yourself—but his manner to you—oh, I could have taken his hand and kissed it to show my gratitude! That it is to be a gentleman, no matter how or where you were born! And of course we must ask them to dinner; only it won't be much entertainment for two men of the world—who have travelled so much and seen so much—it won't be much entertainment for them to come and dine with a couple of silly women——"

"Speak for yourself, you wretch!" retorted the Bean-an-Tighearn, with a show of spirit.

And now the hat and veil had all been properly pinned and fixed.

"'O Eelin fair, beyond compare,'" the young lady said, addressing herself in the mirror. "That's me, mother.

They took to celebrating me in the old ballads, hundreds of years ago. If you want to know all about me——"

"You'll tell me yourself, I suppose, Eelin," said the mother.

"There's one thing I will tell you: as soon as I come back from the town, I will write out the invitation to Mr. Macdonald and his son—for any evening you like to fix—and you'll see what pretty things I will say to them both. Oh, yes, I can, when I choose. You'll see, this time!" and away she went, with her frank, boyish stride—down the gravelled walk, along the banks of the river, across the suspension-bridge, up the Castle hill, and into Castle street. And here she disappeared.

For in this thoroughfare there was an old curiosity shop, the owner of which, an exceedingly good-natured gentleman, allowed Miss Eelin to ransack his stores at will; so that especially on wet days she would spend hour after hour poring over and examining books, medals, coins, engravings, armour, furniture, pottery and porcelain, and the like; and in this way she had acquired a good deal of desultory knowledge. But on this occasion her quest was of a more definite character. She marched up to the counter and said indignantly:

"Mr. Edel, have you seen this morning's *Observer?*"

The portly antiquarian beamed benevolently upon her from over his spectacles.

"Yes, I have, Miss Eelin."

"And did you read the article on the Parallel Roads of Glen Roy?"

"Yes, I did read that paper——"

"Signed 'Fairfax'!—Fairfax, indeed!—I suppose he likens himself to Cromwell's Fairfax! But what I want to know is," she went on, vehemently, "why he should bring in anything about the Macdonalds of Glencoe? The Macdonalds of Keppoch—that's right enough, for Keppoch is near Glen Roy; but why, into a geological paper, should he drag the Massacre of Glencoe and declare that William III. was practically guiltless of it? Oh, it's too bad! He's a Whig, Mr. Edel, a common, cringing, toadying Whig; and I'm going to give him what for. Yes, I am. Only, you must supply me with chapter and verse. Of course every one knows that King William consented to the Massacre—but I must have definite authority——"

"Miss Eelin," said the antiquarian, smiling, "why will you not let that young newspaper lad alone? I have just been hearing something about him. A most worthy youth, I'm told—clever—industrious—ambitious—he will make his mark. Archibald Gilchrist, that's his name—"

"I don't care who or what he is," said the intrepid young Jacobite. "I'm going to give him something he'll remember for trying to gloss over the most shameful crime in history. So you just tell me where I'm to look, Mr. Edel, and I'll hunt for myself; I don't wish to bother you—"

She was rather a pet of his; so without a word he went away to the bookshelves, and after a few minutes returned with a little brown pamphlet.

"I think this will about serve your turn, Miss Eelin," said he. "Listen: 'The Massacre of Glenco, Being a True Narrative of the Barbarous Murther of the Glenco-men, in the Highlands of Scotland, by way of Military Execution, on the 13th of February, 1692. Containing the Commission under the Great Seal of Scotland for making an Enquiry into that Horrid Murther: the Proceedings of the Parliament of Scotland upon it: the Report of the Commissioners upon the Enquiry, laid before the King and Parliament: and the Address of the Parliament to King William for Justice upon the Murderers.'" He turned to the concluding page. "Listen again," said he: "'You know that there never was any prosecution against any of those persons charged with this barbarous murder, but that, on the contrary, by the advice of some who were then about his Majesty, several of the officers were preferred, and the whole matter slurred over; so that the crying guilt of this blood must lie upon them, and not upon the nation, since the Parliament could do no more in it, without occasioning greater bloodshed than they complain of. You know likewise, that by the influence of the same persons, this report was suppressed in King William's time, though his Majesty's honour required that it should have been published.'"

"Yes, but—" she said doubtfully.

"Ah, you mean the actual responsibility?" He turned back a few pages. "Hear this: 'After these instructions, there were additional ones given by his Majesty to Sir

Thomas Livingstone, upon the 16th of the said month of January, supersigned and countersigned by his Majesty, and the date marked by Secretary Stair's hand, which bear orders "for giving of passes, and for receiving the submission of certain of the rebels," wherein all to be noticed to the present purpose is "That therein his Majesty doth judge it much better, that these who took not the benefit of the indemnity in due time, should be obliged to render upon mercy, they still taking the oath of allegiance," and then it is added, if "Mackean of Glenco and that tribe can be well separated from the rest, it will be a proper vindication of the public justice to extirpate that sect of thieves." ' That is from the Commissioners' Report—subscribed at Halyrud-House, the 20th day of June, 1693."

"Is that little book very expensive, Mr. Edel?" said she, timidly (for she was keeping herself on strict allowance, after the affair of the sovereign).

"It's yours, Miss Eelin—it's yours," was the generous reply; and he thrust over the pamphlet towards her hand.

"No, no," said she, drawing back. "I must not—you are always too good to me. But if I borrow it? Will you lend it to me for this afternoon?"

A few minutes afterwards she was off on her way home again—with not much abatement of her swinging gait; and very proud she was, and vindictive, and yet inclined to laugh at herself for her savage impetuosity; and these were the lines that were galloping through her mischievous brain:—

"O what's the rhyme to porringer?
Ken ye the rhyme to porringer?
King James the Seventh had ae dochter,
And he gae her to an Oranger.
Ken ye how he requited him?
Ken ye how he requited him?
The lad has into England come,
And ta'en the crown in spite o' him.

The dog, he sanna keep it lang,
To flinch we'll make him fain again:
We'll hing him hie upon a tree,
And James shall hae his ain again.
Ken ye the rhyme to grasshopper?
Ken ye the rhyme to grasshopper?
A hempen rein, and a horse o' tree,
A psalm-book and a presbyter."

And then again she said—for she was fond of talking to herself—when the weather was fine and the air exhilarating—

"But as soon as I've settled the hash of this fellow—Gilchrist?—Gilchrist, was it?—there will be something pleasanter to do: I must write to the Canadian father and son who were so extremely polite and deferential to my mother. And whatever is very pretty and sweet and nice in the English language they shall have it; and supposing I can't find quite the right phrases in English, then I will send them a few kindly words in the Gaelic; and, if I know anything of those two, that will just gar their heart-strings crack."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEVIL'S KIRN.

Now Wild Eelin was with two or three of her companions, and she was boasting desperately.

"Any one can swim in the sea!" she declared. "For the salt water holds you up. It's very different in a river, especially where there's a strong current. That tries whether you are a swimmer or not. Very well: this is what I'll do with you: I'll bet you five shillings that at daybreak to-morrow morning, before there's any one about, I'll swim from the Devil's Kirn * to the foot of the weir at the Keeper's Cottage. There now: is it a wager?"

"You'll drown yourself, Eelin!" cried one of the girls.

"That's my look-out," was the answer.

"You'll disturb the pools before old Fergus has been over them," said a second. She was the daughter of the owner of the fishing-rights at this part of the stream, and she was a sensible lass.

"Old Fergus says you can't disturb these pools," she replied again, "for it's only passing fish you get."

"Well, I will bet you five shillings," said the third.

"Oh, but that's not the way to accept a bet," said Eelin, impatiently. "When a bet is offered you, you say 'I take you,' or 'I'm on,' or 'Done with you.'"

"Put it how you like," rejoined the other, "but there's my five shillings against yours that you can't swim from the Devil's Kirn up to the weir."

"Right you are," was the definite response which concluded the bargain.

And thus it was that about half-past four on the following morning these young persons, having stolen from their

* Kirn—churn.

several homes, had surreptitiously assembled at the gate of Glengarva House; and Eelin had brought with her two large bath towels. There was no gay boasting now; no laughing over this mad enterprise; whatever had to be spoken was spoken in a subdued whisper; and it was on tiptoe that they crept past the front garden, and glanced warily at the blinded windows. Indeed there was something impressive and even awe-inspiring in the aspect of the silent world around them; for the golden portals of the east were not yet opened; and the strange, grey half-light that spoke of the approaching dawn gave to surrounding objects an unwonted and uncanny look. It was the woods on the hill-side opposite (the woods where the cry of Little Isabel of the Bannocks is heard on the still evenings) that were especially sombre; and yet the individual trees could be distinguished clearly enough. Indeed the distant Castle hill and the towers of the Cathedral and the other features of the town were visible with an unusual distinctness; for as yet no smoke had risen from the houses; while minute by minute the wan light in the heavens seemed to grow stronger and stronger between the heavy swathes of cloud.

Then when Nausicaa and her attendant maidens had gone some little way along the bank, they left the footpath, and crossed some beds of shingle towards a clump of rowan-trees and alder-bushes that formed a sort of semicircle facing the river; and here, by the aid of hat-pins, they managed to fix up one of the bath-towels to the branches, so that she could retire within to make her preparations. There was not the least need for any such concealment; for not a living creature was anywhere to be seen; but well she knew that if she were to attempt to change her dress out here in the open she would be conscious of a million million eyes staring at her from every quarter of this empty and voiceless universe. So she passed behind the improvised screen; and remained there a minute or two; and came out again wearing the extremely scant attire of a professional swimmer. And now she was in truth Nausicaa 'the white-armed,' Nausicaa 'gifted with beauty from the gods'; and perhaps it was carelessness rather than vanity that had caused her to dispense with the customary disfigurement of a bathing-cap; but she wore on her feet a pair of scarlet felt slippers, to take her safely over the

stones. And still she preserved her undaunted air ; it was her companions who had grown apprehensive ; for the black water on this dim and ghostly morning had frightened them ; and even now, at the last moment, they one and all sought to dissuade her.

"Eelin," said one of them, with tears in her voice, "dear old girl, don't try it. The bet is of no consequence ! I would rather forfeit twenty times the five shillings. Just look—that Devil's Kirn seems a terrible place ! "

"Oh, go away ! " said this slim, beautifully-made creature, as she took off her red shoes and placed them on the shingle. "Do you think I am afraid of the Kelpie ? "

But the next moment she uttered a slight scream—she had put her foot timorously into the water.

"Oh, it's mortal cold !—it's mortal cold ! " she said, shivering.

And then boldly she splashed right in—making straight across the shallows, until the racing and swaying stream was swirling and surging round her knees. And ever further and ever deeper ; and the darker the water became around her, the whiter she seemed to grow—'Was never salmon yet that shone so fair among the stakes on Dee.' Then of a sudden she disappeared, all but her head, into a great black hole of a place—into the Devil's Kirn, in fact —and instantly, as her alarmed companions could descry, she was swept down by the heavy current. But this was only a cunning trick on her part. Although apparently she was losing ground, and that rapidly, she was all the time slanting over to the other side ; and it was not until she was well into the deep and comparatively still eddy that she began to put forth her powers. And then they saw that she was gaining—away over there under the hazels and alders ; and on and on she stole with smooth and steady stroke—not very quickly, it is true, but still always making and making, until she got nearly to the top of the Devil's Kirn. Alas ! her troubles were all to come. For here the space of eddy ceased ; and now she had to face the full force of the river ; battling hard (as they could see from the opposite shore) but making scarcely any headway. She was well equipped for this exploit, it is true. She was an expert and practised swimmer ; she had unusual physical strength, considering the slimness of her

frame ; and she had the courage and resolution and tenacity of ten men. But of what avail were these against the deadly weight of this current that came swinging down from the weir ? She fought and fought and fought ; and sometimes they imagined she was making a little progress, and sometimes they seemed to see her drifting back. It was a gallant struggle ; 'And even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer,' in other words, the damsel who to all appearances was likely to win her five shillings would very gladly have foregone the prize (or twenty such) to see the brave swimmer safely on shore again. A right gallant struggle ; but it could have but one end : a Newfoundland dog would have been swept down by the rush of this impetuous flood. And so, when she had beaten the strength utterly out of her, they perceived her suddenly yield to the stream : she was carried quickly along some fifteen or twenty yards : she managed meanwhile to make partly for the shallows ; and presently they saw she had gained a footing, and was wrestling laboriously out, yet hardly able to hold herself against her implacable enemy. And then, when she had got into water not much above her knees, she stood still, panting, her head hanging down, her arms hanging down, unable from sheer exhaustion to move hand or foot further.

But now something happened that sent a swift fire through her veins, and galvanised her into a new life. Even in her helpless collapse, while she was trying to recover her breath, her eyes had been inadvertently wandering ; and to her horror she descried in the distance, coming along the bank, that terrible object—a man !

"Send him away !" she shrieked to her girl-friends. "Send him away !"—and with a wild resumption of vigour she raised her arms and pointed and gesticulated.

But of course they could not hear her, because of the myriad voices of the river ; nor could they see anything, for they were down in front of the rowan-trees ; but as these frantic gestures of hers were repeated, they emerged from their retreat, and looked anxiously around. Their worst forebodings were confirmed. Here was a young man walking slowly and deliberately towards them—a tall, fair-haired young man who appeared to be poring over a book, while he carried a companion volume in his other

hand. For an instant they regarded each other in dismay, not knowing what to do; then the most courageous of them—Lilias Neile by name, though they generally called her Lily Neile—went across the shingle, and up through some more bushes, and boldly marched along the footpath to check the intruder. The poor youth! He had not noticed them, nor apparently had he observed what was going on out in the river: and when, at this lonely hour of the morning, a young lady suddenly advanced upon him out of the gulfs of the unknown, his startled eyes betrayed their alarm.

"Oh, if you please, sir," said the distressed maiden, "would you walk the other way?—oh, if you wouldn't mind, sir—would you walk the other way, if you please, sir——"

The pale face of the student became very red.

"Oh, yes—oh, of course!" he said, in extreme confusion; and at once he turned and made off—in bewildered ignorance of what awful crime he had committed or had been on the point of committing.

Then Eelin painfully and wearily waded through the shallows, and came ashore, and was received by her companions.

"I have failed," said she; and for a second the dark sea-blue eyes looked as if a very little thing would have made them fill.

"Oh, but you tried splendidly!" said one.

"Yes, indeed!" said Lily Neile. "I never saw such a fight—against the impossible!"

Eelin glanced back, vindictively, at the river.

"But I'll do it yet," she said. "I'll do it yet. Didn't I get up to the top of the Kirn?"

"Yes, you did!"

"Very well. But I took the wrong side—that was all. Next time I'll keep to this side all the way up."

"Eelin, do make haste and get dressed, or you'll catch your death of cold!" one of her friends protested; and so she withdrew behind the screen, and was absent for a brief while.

And now the golden dawn was declaring itself in the east, high over the dusky woods: and the swathes of purple cloud were assuming a tinge of rose; and here and there in

the distant town a thin thread of pale-blue smoke wavered up from a chimney, telling of awakening life. When Eelin reappeared, and when the screen had been removed from the branches, the general call was for hurry; for these delinquents fondly hoped they might even yet be able to sneak into their respective homes as free from observation as when they had come out. But another adventure befell them, before they could make any such attempt. Just as they had got to the gate of Glengarva House, and were whispering good-bye to each other, Lily Neile grasped her friend's arm.

"Look, look!" she said, in an excited undertone. "The little white bird—look, look!—what kind of bird is that?"

Indeed it was an unfamiliar object, this small, yellowish, fluttering thing that winged its unaccustomed flight from branch to branch, or perched on the top of the iron railings. But the mystery was immediately solved by Eelin calling out, in the same subdued tones—

"Oh, it's Dickon!—we lost him last night, and searched everywhere—O the dear, to have come home again!—mother will be so delighted—"

But when she hurried forward, the dear showed no disposition to return home with her; on the contrary he continued his silly and uncertain wavering from twig to twig, along these front gardens, and generally just within the iron rail, while his pursuers were continually being baffled, by a few inches, or a foot, or a yard. And so this ignis fatuus lured them on, until almost unawares they had again come upon the poor hunted student whom they had frightened away from the upper part of the river. He was now seated on a wooden bench facing the stream, and he was intent on his books: and if he looked up in some surprise when the maidens drew near, it was only for a moment: he took refuge in the printed page again, no doubt expecting them to pass on and leave him in peace.

But it was just at this point that the escaped canary, having arrived at the end of the railings, fluttered on to the top of a stone wall, and fluttered off again into the garden behind, thus vanishing from sight. It was vexatious beyond measure, when success had been so near. The wall, it is true, was not very high; and any one of these damsels might with an effort have managed to clamber over it: but

then there was a young man not far off, and they had no assurance that his eyes would always be fixed on his book. On the other hand, he seemed a quiet, respectable, modest youth; and so Eelin Macdonald mustered up sufficient courage to approach him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said she, with great civility, "but my mother's pet canary has just flown over this wall—she sets great value on it—it was a present from Malta—I am so anxious to catch it—but—but it has flown over this wall—"

The moment she addressed him, he had at once risen to his feet: and he was now timidly regarding her with a singular admixture of curiosity and diffident respect.

"Oh, would you like me to try and get it for you?" he said—but yet shyly, and with some colour come into his face.

"If you wouldn't mind—it would be so kind of you," she said.

He laid his books on the wooden bench; and with just a passing glance at the other young ladies, he crossed the path, got a foothold on the kerbstone of the railing, and his hand on one of the spikes. Student as he appeared to be, the tall, pale-faced young man proved himself something of a gymnast; in a couple of seconds he had thrown himself over the wall, and disappeared.

"Eelin," said Lily Neile, with a queer look in her eyes, "that was the young man I had to warn off when you were in the water. But he didn't see you—I am certain he didn't see you."

"I do hope he will catch Dickon," was the reply. "Mother will be so delighted."

Well, he did—though in coming back over the wall he had to exercise the greatest caution lest he should squeeze the palpitating small creature. And when he had slid down to the ground, and come forward, he had to exercise equal caution in handing over his prize.

"Oh, I am so much obliged to you," said she, earnestly. "And I am sure my mother would like to thank you—if she knew——"

"I am glad to have been of the slightest service to you, Miss Macdonald," said he—at which she started a little. And then he went on, with considerable hesitation and embarrassment: "And—and if you will forgive my speaking

to you—I would like to explain that it was only yesterday I heard from Mr. Edel who you were—I mean, that you were the writer of the 'White Cockade' articles—and—and my name is Gilchrist."

At this she seemed even more surprised.

"Then you are 'Fairfax'?" she said, suddenly, and with a curious, scrutinising look, that yet had no unfriendliness in it.

"Well, yes," he answered her, shamefacedly. "And I wish to ask your pardon for anything I may have said that might offend you. I did not know. I am afraid you must have considered me impertinent——"

"Not at all!" said she, with the frankest good-nature shining in the clear blue of her eyes. "Nothing of the kind! It has been a fair give and take between us. I dare say I provoked you many a time; and besides it was all a make-believe—it was merely fun——"

"I shall be more careful in the future," he said, in a most humble manner; and then he raised his cap, and bowed to her, and turned away to recover his books; while her companions, having come to the end of this episode, now sped away to their several homes, still vaguely hoping that they might escape detection.

Nor was this the last of Archie Gilchrist that Miss Eelin was to see on this same day. Immediately after luncheon she proposed to convey to Mr. Allan Macdonald's hotel the basket of fruit, adorned with a few flowers, that old Maxwell the gardener had prepared; and her mother, having some business in the town, agreed to accompany her. They had no carriage; and they were economical folk who did not care to spend much money on cabs; so they went on foot; and it was on foot that they were turning from Church-street into Union-street when, at the corner, they ran right against the young man who had captured the canary—he was hurrying home for dinner, in fact. The moment he caught sight of Miss Macdonald, his eyes looked startled and frightened; and he would fain have passed without the least sign of recognition; but she stopped, so as in a manner to intercept him.

"Mother," she said, "I want to introduce to you the gentleman who was so kind as to get back Dickon this morning—Mr. Gilchrist—my mother."

The poor, shy lad—to find himself suddenly face-to-face with the Lady of the House of Kinvaig! He had hardly a word with which to deprecate her prettily-expressed thanks. And then—somehow—with a thumping heart—and with a sound of a strangely-sweet voice in his ear—he succeeded in getting away from them. And what was this now that had come over the town of Invernish?—what glamour and glory was it that seemed to shine along the grey stone pavements?—how had the atmosphere become irradiated, as it were? What had suddenly entered into his life, making a wonder and marvel of it? Was he to count hereafter on some faint—even the remotest—recognition of his existence, and perchance, too, of his poor literary efforts, on the part of the peerless young creature with the dazzling, the bewildering, eyes, the frank, swift look, and the proud poise of her head? When Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig happened to pass him in one of these thoroughfares, might he dare to lift a timid glance towards her, and take off his cap? Perhaps she even expected him to do so? Why, all at once the world had grown richer, and more beautiful, and splendid! When he got home, he could hardly believe that his great good fortune was real: he neglected his food, and kept staring out of the window at the wide river—trying to recall the minutest shades and tones of that momentous encounter.

Meanwhile the Bean-an-Tighearn and her daughter had gone on their way.

"Eileen," said the mother, with an odd expression on her face, "what is that young man?"

"He is a newspaper-writer," replied the daughter—having been led into this mistake by some words of Mr. Edel's. "For one thing, he writes those essays signed 'Fairfax' in the *Observer*."

"Well—don't you think—" and here the gentle-spoken lady hesitated, for she was not in the habit of saying disparaging things of any one—"don't you think he is just a little—well—uncouth in appearance——"

"He's a genius, mother," said Eelin, in her happy-go-lucky fashion, "and they all wear their hair like that. I hope you are not going to judge of the young man by his dress. Are you vexed that I introduced him?"

"Oh, not at all—not at all."

"For, you see," continued the young lady, "I have a natural sympathy with people of genius, because I am of that kind myself."

She was silent and musing for a second or two, and then she said more seriously—

"You have read some of those 'Fairfax' essays, mother?"

"Well, chiefly to see how far you were being involved in a very compromising correspondence," was the unusually severe reply.

"Oh, that was all nonsense," said the girl. "That side of them is all mockery and persiflage. But apart from these banalities I do really believe that young man has got a sort of message, if he only was aware of it. I do believe he has got something to say, if he only knew how to say it. And I think he will find out in time."

CHAPTER VIII.

A COMMISSION.

It was a still and golden evening: golden was the wide river that swung easily and oilily along, save where unseen stones fretted the smooth surface with streaks of purest azure; golden were the thunderous masses of cloud piled high in the east, for they were looking across to the burnished west; and golden was the air that stirred, and no more than stirred, in the garden, bringing with it varied perfumes from the resplendent beds of flowers. The two ladies of Glengarva House were walking up and down, under the branches of a row of lime-trees.

"And do you think, mother," said Eelin, "that those two will pay the least heed to your instructions about morning dress?"

"A seven o'clock dinner; and only ourselves: what else?"

"Ah, but I know those two," said Eelin, confidently. "Do you imagine Mr. Macdonald, who has come all the way from Canada chiefly to see you, do you imagine he is likely to wear morning dress when he is invited to dine with her ladyship of Kinvaig?"

"I wish he wouldn't call me 'her ladyship,'" responded the mother, with a touch of impatience. "He is perfectly aware I have no right to any such title. It may be well enough for some poor crofter body who knows no better——"

"All that he thinks of, mother," the girl contended, "is what will do you most honour, and show his high esteem for you. I wonder he doesn't address you in the third person, as the people of Glengarva do. And I am certain

both of them will take no heed of your warning—why, they will regard it as a great occasion!"

"I hope not—I hope not," said the mother. Indeed neither she nor her daughter had prepared themselves, as regards attire at least, for any great occasion. Eelin, as she strolled up and down this grassy bank, under the limes, wore a quite simple costume of pale daffodil-yellow, with a belt of orange silk, into which she had stuck a bunch of deep crimson roses; while her mother was dressed quite as simply in black, though for once in a way she had pinned at her neck a bit of common heather. Now heather is the badge of the Macdonalds; and this was meant as a little compliment to her guests.

They heard a sound of carriage wheels on the drive; and so they left the cool promenade under the limes, and crossed the tennis-lawn, and passed through the French windows into the drawing-room. Almost simultaneously the door was opened, and Mr. Macdonald and his son made their appearance. Of course they were in evening dress; and Eelin quickly said to herself, while her mother was receiving them—

"Ah, didn't I know! And what an improvement it is, too! Why, the young man would be just terribly handsome if it weren't for the authority and domination of those steadfast eyes of his. That makes one rebel. Certainly one must rebel. It is inconceivable that one is to be bullied by a Canadian!"

But surely there was nothing imperative or self-asserting in the manner of Somerled Macdonald, who now led his father forward to her; on the contrary, when old Allan Macdonald announced that this would unfortunately have to be a farewell visit on the part of his son, who had been summoned back to Canada that very afternoon, and was leaving the next morning, the younger Macdonald could hardly be got to speak of his affairs or plans in any way whatever; he seemed to think that they were too trifling to engage the attention of this gentle lady and her daughter.

"But I hope it is no bad news that is taking you away so suddenly?" Eelin said to him.

"Well, not exactly," he answered her—and if his tones were grave, they were softly modulated and pleasant to hear. "It is merely a matter of business. But it concerns

the interests of a great many people, and I must get over as quickly as I can."

"And does your father go with you?" she asked again.

"No. The old country has cast its fascination over him; and also, if I may say so, the kindness of your mother and yourself. He would like to remain here for a time. The accent of the people in the streets delights him——"

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald!" she protested. "In the streets of Invernish? Why, it's mostly Lowland Scotch they speak—not Highland English at all——"

"He is delighted with it none the less," Somerled went on. "And then, you know, he can recall a little Gaelic; and it pleases him to go about with Angus Macdonald—do you happen to know Angus Macdonald, who was the water bailiff at Kinvaig?"

"Angus? Of course! He is a friend of mine," said she—for she had many friends, of all classes.

Then he told her the story of the dismissal.

"But Lord Mountmahon can't dismiss him," said she, promptly, "for Angus is in the service of Sir Charles Orme."

"Sir Charles is not likely to quarrel with a paying tenant," he answered her, "over a matter of that sort. However, I have undertaken to find employment for old Angus, and in the meantime he can remain with my father, and take him about. Angus will be well looked after. My father envies you that you have it always in your power to do a kindness to some one of the Macdonalds of Glengarva——"

"And who has done more than himself?" said she. But at this moment dinner was announced; and so they proceeded into the dining-room.

It was not an elaborate meal; but it was seasoned throughout with the utmost friendliness and goodwill; and Eelin had soon grown accustomed to the grave and direct look of the younger man, who at the same time was so deferentially courteous, especially towards her mother. Nay, she began mentally to compare him with other young men she knew, who rather prided themselves on having a pretty wit; and she was profoundly grateful to this one for not being facetious. Was it his extreme and obvious respect for the Bean-an-Tighearn that kept him so restrained? At all events, Eelin found no fault with him;

and as for herself, on this occasion she indulged in no wild paradoxes or other romps.

When the ladies rose from table, Miss Eelin went and fetched from the sideboard a box of cigars.

"I fear you will suspect them," she said, "in a house governed by womenfolk."

But Somerled turned from her to her mother.

"I understood that you and your daughter generally went out into the garden on these fine evenings," said he, almost timidly. "If you would allow us to accompany you, I am sure both my father and myself would rather do that."

"Indeed yes, madam," put in the elder Macdonald. "And it's the boy's last evening in the Highlands, for the present, at least."

"Oh, by all means—by all means!" said their silver-haired and sweet-voiced hostess. "Will you come with me, Mr. Macdonald?"

She put her hand lightly on his arm, and in this way guided him into and through the dining-room, and out by the French windows, and across the lawn to her favourite walk under the lime-trees, on the raised embankment overlooking the wide-flowing stream. It was a gracious evening, the golden glow gradually giving place to a clear and tender twilight, the foliage of the woods opposite becoming more and more intensely green, the swinging current showing sharp glints of a steely grey. Hardly a sound broke the listening silence, save the occasional muffled bark of a dog, or the distant rumble of a cart making its way into the town. Then the air bore about with it many fragrances; altogether, it was an hour that Somerled Macdonald was likely to remember, when he was far enough away from these tranquil scenes.

For it was no other than the Daughter of the House of Kinvaig who was walking with him, and doing her best—and not failing much—to interest him with her quick-witted ways, her bright humour, and her shrewd and varied knowledge both of human nature and of books that seemed surprising in one of her years. And then, besides, to complete the undoing of him, he had never before, on their previous visit, seen the living beauty of her face so animated and radiant, he had never so entirely succumbed to the

glance, casual and unintentional as it might be, of her all-conquering eyes. He began to wonder where he had seen something like those eyes; and at length he remembered. It was when his father and he, on their voyage hither, had been coming up Loch Linnhe. A wild day it was, with a brisk north-easter blowing; but gradually the heavens had opened overhead, and there shone along the wind-driven sea a lustrous blue, while the surrounding mountains of Morven and Kingairloch remained dark and sombre—ay, nearly as black as Eelin Macdonald's outcurving lashes. So that was the strange combination he saw here repeated in little? He did not know that her Gaelic-speaking friends called her Eelin of the wave-blue eyes: it was a similitude that his Celtic perception had recognised for himself.

"Do you know, Miss Macdonald," said he, "that I heard you sing 'The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond' when you thought there was no one by? It was when my father and I called the other day; and the drawing-room windows were open; so that we heard quite clearly. And I was going to ask you what version that was you sung. The ordinary version has become very popular among the Highlanders in Ontario—"

"I am sorry to hear that," said she.

"Why?" he asked, in some amazement.

"Because it is spurious. It isn't a Highland song at all; and it isn't a Lowland Scotch song; it's nothing—but trash. The curious thing," she continued—and she appeared to have forgotten all about her resolve to rebel against the domination of his quiet steady look: she was talking to him in the most unconcerned and simple and natural fashion—"is that the refrain and the air seem to be genuine, and yet I can't find any trace of either amongst the old books except, perhaps, there is some suggestion of 'The Bonnie House o' Airlie;' and I have got a good number of them—it's rather a hobby of mine, hunting about among the old tunes—the 'Orpheus Caledonius,' the 'Highland Fair,' and collections of that sort; yet I can't find any definite origin for 'The Banks of Loch Lomond.' The story that both words and music were taken down from the singing of a little boy in Edinburgh streets won't answer at all: the little street-boys in Edinburgh are not in the habit of singing 'Where in purple hue the Hieland

hills we view.' What is that? Is it Highland, or is it Scotch, or is it—rubbish? It's rubbish!"

"Then where did you get the version I heard you sing?" he asked. "I thought it was beautiful!"

"Oh, don't say that!" she answered him, with a bit of a laugh. "For if I must confess, I scribbled the lines myself. I don't think much of them—they are rather poor——"

"They are beautiful!" he said again.

"No, no; they are poor enough; but at least they're not so awful as the other ones: are they, now? Oh, if Kingsley were alive, what an exquisite little ballad he might write to that refrain! Or Mr. Swinburne could do it if he chose—his Northumbrian poems are admirable. But I daren't write and make the suggestion; he would merely think I wanted his autograph——"

"Miss Macdonald," he said, submissively, "is your harp still in the summer-house over there?"

"Yes——"

"I wish you would let my father hear one or two of the old airs you speak of," said he (for he would not presume to ask on his own account).

"Those that can best be sung to the harp are mostly plaintive," she said.

"Why not?"

By this time the elder Macdonald and his hostess had betaken themselves to a garden-seat which was not very far from the summer-house; and there was tea on the small table before them.

"Very well," said Eelin, "if you will go and join them, I will try to sing you one or two of the older things."

She went and hid herself in her bower of white roses and honeysuckle: she preferred being unseen when she was singing. And presently, in the mystic grey of the twilight that was stealing over the world—in a stillness that was hardly broken by the hushed murmur of the stream—they heard the first notes of the prelude. They did not recognise the air; but the elder Macdonald, at least, knew the words well—

'It was a' for our rightfu' King
We left fair Scotland's strand!
It was a' for our rightfu' King
We e'er saw Irish land,
My dear,
We e'er saw Irish land.'

And where and how could this slip of a girl have had experience of the tragic side of life that she should be able to put such pathos into this simple strain ?

"She hasn't much of a voice," said her mother, as a kind of apology to her guests, "but she has been trained fairly well. We spent two winters in Milan." Neither of them replied to her : one of them, indeed, could not have spoken at this moment—his heart was like to burst within him, so sensitive and responsive was he to the thrill of those pathetic tones.

'The sodger frae the war returns,
The sailor frae the main;
But I hae parted frae my love
Never to meet again,
My dear,
Never to meet again.

When day is gane, an' night is come,
An' a' folk bound to sleep,
I think on him that's far awa,
The lee-lang night, an' weep,
My dear,
The lee-lang night, an' weep.'

In the silence that followed not a word was said by any one. And then the trembling strings were touched again ; and she sang *The Broom of* Cowdenknows—

O the Broom, the bonny Broom,
The Broom of Cowdenknows ;
I wish I were at hame again,
To milk my Daddy's Ews.

And again she sang *The Wawking of the Fauld.*

'My *Peggy* speaks sae sweetly,
Whene'er we meet alane,
I wish nae mair, to lay my Care,
I wish nae mair, of a' that's rare.

My *Peggy* speaks sae sweetly,
To a' the Lave I'm cauld;
But she gars a' my Spirits glow
At Wawking of the Fauld.'

And that was followed by *Were na my Hearts light I wad dee*—

'His Kin was for ane of a higher Degree,
Said, what had he do with the Likes of me?
Suppose I was bonny, I was na for *Johnny ;*
And were na my Hearts light I wad dee.'

Then she stepped forth from her hiding place, and approached them, rather bashfully.

"These are one or two of the old airs," she said, with some affectation of carelessness.

"And one thing I know," said the elder Macdonald. "They have never been sung like that since first they were written down." The younger Macdonald did not trust himself to offer even a word of thanks: he held his peace.

"But won't you come into the house now?" she continued. "It's getting dark. Or would you rather look at Lily Neile fishing?—She throws a good line."

For a moment they could not understand what she meant; but Somerled Macdonald followed the direction her eyes indicated; and now he perceived that a new feature had stolen unobserved into the scene before them. Out on the middle of the river, that had become of a livid and leaden hue in the mysterious twilight, there was a ghostly white boat; and standing upright in the boat was a dim grey figure—the figure of a young girl who with regular and graceful movement was plying a salmon rod. The line itself was invisible; but they could see by the forward and upright action of her arms that she was throwing well; while inch by inch the boat was allowed to creep down with the current. It was a spectral performance, and so silent that it all seemed unreal: was this a spirit-maiden and a spirit-boat that had come gliding into the vague incertitude that prevailed around?

"Let us go over and see if she has any luck," said Eelin. "She is getting near a good place."

Thereupon Miss Eelin crossed the tennis-lawn, towards the high and railed bank overlooking the river; and Somerled accompanied her; but the mother, with her usual consideration, recognising that this could be no entertainment for a sightless man, again placed her hand lightly on her companion's arm, and said—

"We may as well go into the house, Mr. Macdonald; they will follow directly."

And still the grey lady plied her phantom rod; and still old Fergus, himself but a shadow, allowed the magic craft to creep stealthily down.

"Lily!" Eelin called aloud to the apparition out in mid-stream. "Lily!—what have you got on?"

It was a somewhat ambiguous question ; but at once the answer came back from the dark and palpable obscure.

"White Wing ! "

"Have you seen anything ? " was the next question.

"About thirty dozen—jumping everywhere—and I haven't had one rise ! "

"You should try the Devil's Kirn over again. Good-night ! " This was the final call to the wraith out there in the hollow gloom ; for Eelin had just become aware that the other two had gone indoors ; and now she turned away from the river, she and her companion, to rejoin them.

And as they were making across the lawn towards the house, Somerled Macdonald said to her, in rather a hesitating way—

"I have a great favour to ask of you, Miss Macdonald. You know, I cannot in the least tell when I may be able to return to this country. And since I have been here I have heard a good deal—but I have guessed more—as to what you and your mother, you especially, have been doing for my kinsfolk ; yes, I must call them my kinsfolk, for so I have been brought up to regard them ; and the gratitude I feel to you about it is more than I can put into words. But here is something more practical, and I hope you won't take it ill. Will you—for a time at least, and to a small extent—will you become my almoner ? You see, out in Canada, how can I learn anything ?—whereas you are on the spot ; you know all these people ; you are interested in them ; you are friends with them. And a young fellow might want a decent suit of clothes if he was applying for a situation ; or a girl might want a few ribbons for her wedding-day : it isn't fair that your mother and you should be expected to do everything simply because you are the head of the House of Kinvaig. I hope you won't take it ill that I should ask you— "

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald ! " she remonstrated. "Take it ill ? How can you think of such a thing ? "

"Well," he said, "I am going away early to-morrow ; and I thought I might as well bring along a cheque for the amount—it's only a temporary provision—there's more where that came from—there's plenty more where that came from—for the same purpose. And I have made the cheque payable to you, for I would not trouble your mother ;

indeed I understand you are her almoner too—oh, yes, I have heard in Invernish of your kindness, your charities, and your dependents, both there and in Glengarva ; and if you would be so friendly as to allow me to help—in this rough and brutal way—it's the only thing I can do—"

"Of course I should have to ask permission of my mother first," she said. "Shall we go in now ?"

She opened the French windows, and they passed into the lamp-lit drawing-room ; and without more ado, she placed Somerled Macdonald's proposal, with the explanatory circumstances, before her mother. The Bean-an-Tighearn gave a smiling acquiescence ; and Somerled took an envelope from his pocket, and somewhat shyly placed it on the table. That was all : he seemed relieved when the incident was over.

But after the two Macdonalds had gone—they did not prolong their stay, on account of the younger man's departure on the morrow—when Eelin took up this envelope and casually opened it, and looked at the cheque, she uttered an exclamation.

"Mother !" she cried—and she seemed quite aghast. "See what he has done !"

Well, her mother also appeared somewhat dismayed when she regarded this bluish-white slip of paper ; for on it she read : *Montreal and Provincial Bank, Limited. . . Pay to Miss Eelin Macdonald, or Order . . . One Thousand Pounds . . .* £1,000 *. . . Somerled Macdonald.*

"It will be a great responsibility, Eelin," said she, still regarding the paper.

"Oh, yes, yes," said the girl, instantly clutching at the hope of escape. "Far too great ! I did not dream of anything so serious. Such a sum—even from the Canadian Railway King—as his father sometimes calls him—how can I accept it ?—I couldn't !—I couldn't ! Now if he had entrusted it to you ; but then he said he did not wish to trouble you ; and I promised without imagining he could be so recklessly generous. And what is to be done ? I must ask him to take it back !"

"That is the one thing you can not do," said her mother, with unusual decision, "if I know anything of either of those two men. It would be little better than an insult."

"Mother, I hardly even thanked him !" Eelin exclaimed

again. And then after a moment or two she said: "So you really think I am bound to accept this tremendous responsibility? Very well, but first of all I must write and explain; yes, indeed; and if I did not thank him before, I will now—ah, I will—I will! His father will give me his address. And I will take time; I will take time, and consider; and he shall see whether the Kinvaig Macdonalds of the old country are an ungrateful lot of folk—if a letter can tell him anything!"

And so it was that early on the next morning Somerled Macdonald set out on his return to his western home. But he was a very different man from the Somerled Macdonald who had only a few weeks previously landed on English shores: he was carrying with him a wound the depth and permanency of which he himself perhaps did not as yet wholly understand.

CHAPTER IX.

HITHER AND THITHER.

At an early hour of the following day, Wild Eelin, with black Beelzebub perched on her shoulder, marched into the first-floor bath-room, to get some water for the flowers in her mother's boudoir. It was a glorious morning: the world a blaze of splendour; the window had been thrown wide open; and the branches of the row of elms and limes that formed a screen between the back of the house and the main garden were all shimmering and glittering and dancing in the sunlight. She was just about to fill the jug at the lavatory when she heard voices immediately underneath—in the wide open space, partly flagged and partly sward, that served chiefly as a drying-green; and out of mischief she stayed her hand. For well she knew who these two were; indeed, by peeping over an inch or two, she could have had them in full view: one of them, Maxwell the Scotch gardener, a little, wizened, pippin-faced, winking-eyed man, who had just been into the kitchen with the day's supply of vegetables; the other a big, raw-boned, freckled, red-haired Highland lass, by name Morag, who was fixing clothes along one of the lines. At the moment they did not seem to be on the best of terms.

"I tell ye, ye've no introspection!" he said, tauntingly.

She flushed up in anger.

"Maybe I have, and maybe I have not," she answered him. "But it is none of your business; and if you will say such things to me, I will be telling my mistress, yes, I will!"

"Ye're as Hielan's Mull!" he said, with contempt.

"And that," she retorted, with equal contempt, "is better than a little Lowland body whatever."

He was about to move off, himself and his wooden basket; but then he turned and addressed her again; he had apparently something that he was determined to communicate to her limited intelligence.

"Can ye understand this, now?" he said to her, menacingly. "I tell ye, ye've no introspection; or ye would ken that the soul and the body are twa different things: ay, and that the soul can leave the body, just as it diz when ye're asleep and dreamin': ay, and what's to hinder anither soul frae comin' back to your empty body, and making ye think an' feel like somebody else? Do ye understand that now?"

She did not reply, for she had a clothes-pin in her mouth—quite unnecessarily distending the same. So he proceeded:

"Did ye ever hear tell of David Haggart, that was hanged at Edinburgh, the 18th of July, 1821? He was the cleverest pickpocket and jile-breaker in a' the South o' Scotland and the North of England too; ay, and when he was pitten in jile to be hanged for the murder, he wrote out the confessions o' his hale life; so that one that's like him in the body micht very weel become the receptacle o' his wanderin' soul; ay, and feel and think just like him. Look at my forks!"

He extended to her the fore and middle fingers of his right hand, rather drawing in the middle finger, so that they appeared to be nearly of the same length.

"D'ye see that, now?—thae twa fingers equal: Haggart was born that way: he was bound to be a thief. Dod, them's the fingers that can get into a keek-cloy——"

"And maybe you will be telling me what that is, when it is at home," she remarked, still somewhat scornfully—but she was interested, and even impressed.

"Keek-cloy? It's a breeches-pocket, and that's what it is——"

"And are you proud, then," she said, in her Highland accent, "that you are able to be a thief?"

"That's naething to do with it, ye gomeril, if ye would listen and understand," he exclaimed. And then he continued, in a low and earnest voice, fixing his nervously-twitching eyes upon her: "How do ye ken that it's no David Haggart that's talking to ye at this verra meenit—

David Haggart that murdered the jiler in Dumfries ? Ay, I thocht that would mak ye stare ! And what's to hinder ? They hanged the body o'm and buried the body o'm, in Edinburgh, in the year 1821 ; but his soul gangs skelpin about wi' the lave ; and what's to hinder it frae taking lodgement in me, John Maxwell, for a day, or an hour, or aiblins five meenits ; so that it's David Haggart's feelins that's inside me, ay, and his desires, and his black thochts. Diz that no frichten ye ?—that maybe it's a murderer that's talkin' to ye at this meenit—no John Maxwell at a', but David Haggart the murderer—and thinking such thochts as daurna be named. For that's what they ca' the transmotion o' souls ; and it's gospel truth ; and it's no merely that ye can look at David Haggart's fingers—it's himself that may be speakin' to ye—oot o' a dark imagination."

The big, uncouth Highland lass began to yield to the spell ; she was 'glowering' at him with concentrated eyes ; if she only half-comprehended his meaning, she was none the less conscious that there was some possibility of horror lurking behind the mysterious solemnity of his tones.

"Did ye never hear tell of the iron helmet of Kilmainham ?" he went on—and he held her enchained as a serpent holds a trembling and struggling bird. "That was when Haggart was in jile in Ireland ; and he was impident to the jiler ; and they put that awfu' thing ower his head, a cage of iron bars and an iron tongue that went into his mouth. And when they took it off he spent the whole of the rest of that day in singing a' the wild and wicked songs he could remember, for there was no kind o' sin or iniquity that wasna but child's play to him. And if ye would tak heed to this now, that when ye're comin' through the gairden ye may be thinkin' it's me ye're talkin' to ; ay, but it's the spirit o' David Haggart may be answerin' ye—the spirit of a black murderer—that wrote out his ain life in the condemned cell at Edinburgh ; his inmost thochts are there—ye can amaist hear'm speakin——"

It was at this point that Miss Eelin, standing at the open window just above them, took down Beelzebub from her shoulder, got hold of him fore and aft, and gently dropped him so that he lit with protruded claws on the old gardener's head. The commotion that ensued was

instantaneous and fearsome; for the startled yell of pain and terror wrung from old Maxwell was as nothing to the shrill shriek after shriek uttered by the panic-stricken laundry-maid. Miss Eelin now deemed it prudent to retire from the window; she filled the jug at the bath instead of at the lavatory; and then with a calm and serene countenance—lest she should meet any one in the corridor—she proceeded to her mother's room.

But there was nothing demure or austere in her manner when, a little while thereafter, she started off for the town. She had a thousand pound cheque in her purse; that gave her a fine sense of personal importance; and she walked with a gay bearing and a buoyant stride. And yet there was not much real swagger under this appearance of bravado: for she was a humorous kind of creature; and whenever she caught herself giving herself airs, she recalled a couple of lines from one of her old ballads, that invariably set her laughing. It was a vivid picture that this refrain presented to her imagination—

'Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
And gie my gown room!'

—and on this occasion, as she was going into Invernish, the verses would keep recurring to her brain:

'I'll gar our gudeman trow
I'll sell the ladle,
If he winna buy to me
A bonnie side-saddle,
To ride to kirk and bridal,
And round about the town;
Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
And gie my gown room!

* * *

I'll gar our gudeman trow
That I'm gaun to die,
If he winna fee to me
Valets twa or three,
To bear my train up frae the dirt,
And ush me through the town;
Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
And gie my gown room!'

Indeed, she was giggling to herself as she ascended the stair leading to the office of her mother's solicitors; but the moment she had opened the door—and found herself

confronted by the young men in the outer apartment—she was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig again, very courteous, and polite, and dignified; and so she was when she was ushered into an inner room, where she seriously conversed with Mr. Innes about the safe disposal of this considerable sum; and so she was when subsequently she went along to the railway-station, and sought an audience of the station-master.

"Mr. Forbes," said she, "I want you to reserve a third-class compartment for me, by the three o'clock train."

"For you, Miss Macdonald?" said the tall, portly, goodnatured official, looking down upon her with a paternal, and yet puzzled, air.

"Yes. You remember that young fellow Geddes who got smashed about a fortnight ago by the runaway horse and van. He's doing fairly well; but we want to send him to our Convalescent Home—at Nairn, you know; and he'll have to be carried along here on a stretcher; and I want a compartment kept for himself and the nurse, so that he shan't be stared at by strangers."

"Oh, now I understand: well, I'll see what we can do for you," said the station-master.

"Oh, but I want a definite promise," said she. "I know you are always very busy; and there's generally a desperate rush about that three o'clock train; and when it's only as far as Nairn, I think you might stretch a point——"

"I'll go along and see to it myself this very moment," he said; and he lifted his hat to the young lady, and hurried away: he had not much time, during official hours, for general conversation.

So Eelin was left alone on the platform. She did not at once turn and set out for home. She was gazing, rather absently, at the lines of rail that led away from where she stood, narrowing and narrowing until they disappeared at the first curve. These were but the beginning of a long journey that had been undertaken that morning. They had a vacant look now; and she had a dim impression that all the world around her had in a measure grown empty too; and along with this she experienced an unaccountable feeling of remorse and regret. She did not know what it was she had done, or left undone, that vaguely disturbed her so; but of a sudden she thought she would go away

and endeavour to find old Mr. Macdonald, and, if she was so fortunate as to encounter him, she would try to say the kindest things to him she was capable of saying.

There was the initial difficulty that she shrank from calling at his hotel, to inquire as to his whereabouts; but luck was on her side; for no sooner had she passed out from the station than she descried in the distance, in Union-street, the erect and lofty figure of the blind man, accompanied by Angus, the water-bailiff. It is true, they were going away from her; and it would never do for Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig to be seen running along one of the principal streets of Invernish; but she at once got hold of a small boy, gave him a penny, and bade him fly after the tall gentleman, and ask him to stop for a minute. The result was satisfactory; she received and returned the heartiest of greetings; and of course she shook hands with Angus as well, and inquired about his daughter up at Ben Vora. Then Angus fell behind; she took his place; and the three of them together proceeded on their way, which happened to be nowhither in particular.

"I suppose Mr. Somerled left this morning?" she said, by way of inviting communications.

"Yes, poor chap," his father answered her. "He was rather down in the mouth. Not that he said much. He is of a strong and earnest nature; but he does not talk too freely about himself. What I could best make out was he had come to the conclusion that this country was no country for him."

"No country for him?" she repeated, in surprise—and perhaps with a twinge of disappointment too. "Why?"

"Well, I did not myself quite understand," the elder Macdonald went on. "He said something about there being too much romance in the air—likely to lead to wild fancies—and to carry one off one's head. He said it would steady his nerves a bit when he got back to the price of steel rails, the state of the labour market, and problems of that kind."

She was clearly crestfallen; but of course he did not perceive it—except, perhaps, in her altered tone.

"I thought he had a great affection," said she, in a hurt sort of way, "for the land of his forefathers, the land of his kinsmen and his clan."

"That is the faith he has been brought up in, and he is not likely to fall away from it," was the reply.

"And what fault has he to find with the country, or with the people either?" she demanded, rather proudly, "that he should prefer to get back to steel rails and the labour market?"

"Nay, dear young lady, but I think it's the other way about," said old Macdonald, in a placable fashion. "Coming among his kinsfolk, and seeing the actual places that he had known only by name, and living in an atmosphere of historical and poetical associations—well, all that may be unsettling to a man of business habits and pursuits; and then, I fancy, being in the old home of his race, and seeing and hearing so much of the loyal clan-spirit, and the self-sacrifice and the generosity of other people—yourself not the least of them, if I may say so—he has been troubling himself that he could do nothing: an unworthy son of the Kinvaig Macdonalds he felt himself to be—though that naturally is not my opinion—for there are worse lads than Somerled—and he has not had much opportunity——"

"He could do nothing?" she exclaimed, rushing to the other extreme. "But didn't he tell you what happened last night?—the money he left with me on trust—"

"Well, he doesn't talk much, as I say. He did mention something the other day of asking either your mother or yourself to take charge of some small sum that might be of benefit to those who were more or less dependent on you——"

"A small sum, Mr. Macdonald? It was a thousand pounds."

The old man laughed.

"That's like Somerled," was all he remarked, half to himself, and not by way of reprobation.

"And you must give me his address, Mr. Macdonald," she resumed, "for I did not at all thank him properly; and he will consider me so ungrateful if I do not write; and besides I would like to place before him a few indications as to how the money can be used—"

"I am certain he would much prefer to leave it entirely to your own discretion—"

"Oh," said she, rather shortly, "if he is so busy—steel rails and the labour market—perhaps he would not care to have a letter from me? I should not like to intrude—"

"A letter from you," said old Macdonald, gravely, "is, I am sure, what he does not expect. He would not presume so far. I know him. But if you were, out of your goodness and your gentleness, to send him a letter—that would be a very proud day for him— "

"Why, of course I must write to him!" she cried. "What would he think of me if I didn't ?—no, what should I think of myself ? "

She took out her little note-book, and pencilled down the address. By this time they had reached the river-side ; and she was about due at home, for luncheon ; yet she knew she had not been half so kind to the old gentleman as she had intended to be : they had been talking about Somerled Macdonald all the time. So she said—

"I hope you won't find Invernish very dull now that your son has gone."

"Oh, no," said he, cheerfully enough. "Angus and I get on famously. And we are planning a few excursions. I would like to go down to Fort William, and strike inland a bit ; it is on one of the Corriechoillie pools, on the Spean, that I caught my first fish— "

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald," she cried, eagerly—for here was an opening—"are you a salmon-fisher ? "

"I used to wet a line now and again," he responded. "But of course I have never thought of such a thing since the railway accident that made me what I am."

"Ah, but you could do perfectly well ! " she said, with conviction. "There is not the slightest difficulty. All you want is some one with you to tell you where to stand —and when to put out more line—and how to keep clear of the trees. If you would like to try, I think I could get you a day on the Laggan Water, on the Nish here ; I am almost sure I could ; General Mallock is a particular friend of mine. And I would go with you, as well as Angus ; for I know all the pools— "

"Miss Macdonald," he remonstrated—and he seemed to be greatly touched by this offer on her part—"do you think I could accept such a favour from you ?—taking up your time—and troubling you— "

"I should like it ! " she said : and without a moment's pause she continued : "Well, that's settled. And as soon as I have seen General Mallock, I will send you word about

the day. And if you provide the carriage—it's a drive of four or five miles—I will provide the luncheon, for I know better than Angus what should go in the basket. Now, I must hurry home, Mr. Macdonald. Mind you come in and have a chat with us, any time you are walking up the river-side." So they parted ; and for a moment or two old Allan Macdonald stood there motionless : it was as if he were trying to imagine the retreating figure—trying to look after her with his sightless eyes.

Now this was a Saturday ; and when Eelin got home, and when the two ladies had taken their places for lunch, her mother said to her—

"I have just been reading to-day's *Observer*."

"I had no time to look at it this morning," was the off-hand answer. "But I know it's a poor number. There's nothing of mine in it."

"Isn't there ?" her mother said, sharply. "Eelin, have you been playing tricks with me ? Are you 'Fairfax' ?"

"I, 'Fairfax' ? Good gracious, how could I be ! Why, I introduced him to you, mother, only the other day, at the corner of Union-street !"

"It is somewhat remarkable, then, that he should describe, with singular minuteness, the very incident you told me of—the taking of a salmon in the twilight, just out there, with the whole town of Invernish looking on."

"But if all the people of Invernish were looking on," she responded gaily, "and as he is one of the people of Invernish, then he must have been looking on. Now that's what they call logic. Mother, dear, every other day I am giving you proof after proof of the greatness of my mind !"

"But there is one thing he describes," the mother proceeded, "in this article, that you did not mention. He says that a young lady, 'the representative of an old and honoured name,' took part in the affair, especially towards the end. Well, I must say it was rather a conspicuous thing for any girl to do—before such a crowd—and she being apparently quite alone too——"

At these simple and yet terrible words the easy nonchalance of Miss Eelin's manner had abruptly fled : and it was as well that her mother had ceased to regard her, for her face was aglow with shame and apprehension.

"Yes—and of course," said she, rather breathlessly, "of

course—an anonymous writer—an anonymous writer—could not miss the chance; of course he has taken the opportunity of being facetious—he has tried to be witty—to throw ridicule on the girl——"

"Oh, no," the mother rejoined, placidly, "not at all. I think the young man—if it is the same young man we met—rather deserves commendation. His reference to the young lady who helped to land the fish is done very nicely—done with discretion—and with evident respect. I don't think she will have any reason to complain, if she ever sees it."

Instantly Eelin's spirits jumped up again. She had not been made fun of, then? She would not have to carry the war into the enemy's country, to compass her revenge?

"Well, mother," she said, in her usual buoyant way, "why shouldn't you cultivate the young man's acquaintance, and get to know him better? You've only had experience of one genius—that's me. And you've had enough of me. Why not try this other one?—he might turn out to be a coruscator——"

"A what?"

"A coruscator—one that coruscates; just as an imperator is one that imperates," she replied, as bold as brass; and then she went on: "Why don't you ask him to lunch? He saved the life of poor Dickon, that certainly would have been caught and eaten by General Mallock's cat. Fancy the honour of entertaining a poet at lunch!"

But this wild project did not at the moment recommend itself to the Bean-an-Tighearn; and, as their brief and frugal repast very soon came to an end, nothing further was said. The moment that her mother had finished, Eelin was on her feet.

"Give me the key of the cellaret, mother; I want some brandy for my flask."

"I thought you said the poor lad was quite strong now to be moved without risk?"

"So he is, I think. But there will be the jolting in getting him into the railway-carriage. It's better to be on the safe side."

Accordingly she filled the little silver flask with brandy and water; and presently she was hurrying on her way into the town, making for a very humble tenement in one of the

outlying quarters, and for an equally humble lodging contained therein. Old Maxwell (perhaps with David Haggart's soul inside him) had preceded her hither; and he and she and the nurse set to work to get the poor chap, whose knees had been badly smashed by the runaway horse and van, conveyed to the railway-station. They were in abundance of time; Mr. Forbes had reserved a third-class compartment; and they soon had the convalescent comfortably placed; while Maxwell got into the carriage too, to help the nurse at the termination of the journey. Eelin waited for the train to start; and saw them safely off; then the bustle on the platform gradually died away; the porters dispersed in search of other duties; and once more she was left alone, as she had been earlier in the day.

And there before her were the long and narrowing lines of rail that had awakened some curious fancies—and also a dim, unintelligible feeling of compunction and regret—an hour or two before. Since then, moreover, she had heard something that still further had disquieted her.

"This country is no country for him?" she kept repeating to herself, in a kind of wistful fashion. "No country for him? What could he mean by that?"

CHAPTER X.

A HARBOUR OF REFUGE.

On a Monday morning the young men and young women of Struthers's shop—establishment, perhaps one ought to say—returned to their monotonous toil with a dull sense of inevitableness and resignation; but their master arrived in a very different mood; he came back more determined than ever to whip up this idle crew by lashing them with his vituperative tongue. Everything was wrong; nothing was right; objurgations, taunts, envenomed innuendoes thickened the air; a Newhaven fishwife in a fury would have been smothered into silence by this male virago. But on this particular Monday morning his insensate invective was more especially directed against a hapless young person who doubtless had been guilty of an act of carelessness: the facts being these. On the Saturday a box of kid gloves had been shown to a customer, who had ruthlessly hauled about the contents; by some accident the lid had got slipped on again; the young woman behind the counter, subsequently setting things right, made the mistake of thinking that this box had not been opened, and put it back on the shelf; then, somehow or other, on the Monday morning the box had fallen into the hands of Struthers himself, who, on discovering its dishevelled condition, broke out into an ungovernable rage. Of course the poor lass had no excuse to offer; she had not a word to say for herself; she could only suffer this continuous whirlwind of abuse, while trying to go about her work in a mechanical way; and she tried to hide from her companions the tears that would keep trickling down her cheeks. Well, the long and the short of it was that Archie Gilchrist lost his head. He left his

recessed corner, and strode out into the middle of the floor —his cheeks very white.

"Will ye stop that viperous tongue o' yours, ye miserable creature, or I'll fling ye into the street!" he said in a panting kind of way—and indeed to the astounded and frightened bystanders it seemed as though he was going to put his threat into execution there and then. "If ye were a man ye would take shame to yourself, to bully a girl like that! But you a man?—you a man?—you misbegotten imp!——"

Struthers's eyes appeared to be starting from their sockets. He could not find speech. He could only point with a shaking forefinger to the door.

"Go!" he managed to say at last. "Go!"—

"When I'm ready," Gilchrist replied; and he went back to his desk, and took his Horace and his Livy and the little Latin dictionary; he reached down his cap and put it on; and then, amidst an awe-stricken silence, he marched forth from the shop. It was all the work of one wild minute: the consequences were likely to be more protracted.

His first sensation, out here in the open, was of a wondering and joyous liberty. He was free! He had no longer a master, to browbeat him at every turn. The leaden drag of account-books in hopeless arrear of making-up he had cast for ever behind him. The great wide world was before him, with all its boundless possibilities; he was a man among his fellow-men, and no longer a slave; he had come into possession of his birthright; he claimed his share of the beneficent sunlight, the moving clouds, the colour of the hills, and there was no one to say him nay. And so, in this new spirit of enfranchisement, and with a light heart and an agile step, he breasted the steep slope leading up the Castle hill; until on the summit he paused to regard the spacious panorama stretching away on every hand. His soul rose within him at the sight. He felt that he had attained to a larger horizon; that his prison-bands were broken for ever.

Yes; but up yonder in the north were the dim and billowy mountains of Ross-shire; and somewhere not far from the base was the little town of Dingwall; and in that town lived a poor and solitary widow whose nervous anxiety about her son's future was not altogether due to selfish

considerations. And what would she say to this terrifying story? It is true that every shilling he could save he sent her; and that, along with the small pension allotted her by the railway company on the tragic death of her husband, who had been a plate-layer on the line, just enabled her to tide along in a kind of way; but it was not of herself she would be thinking. The very width of that horizon, which to his imagination had seemed so welcome a thing, would appal her. Might she not even implore him to go back? The little tyrant might yet be propitiated by a sufficiently servile attitude and a sufficiently humble apology. For while the poor lone woman was well aware of her son's pulsating hopes and vaguely ambitious aims—and in secret consoled many a weary hour by participating in them, and picturing to herself the great things he was to do—still she knew that he had a safe and solid foothold in Struthers's shop. Latin, Greek, geology, metaphysics, and literary contributions to the Invernish *Observer* might all be indulged in, while there was a secure twenty-six shillings coming in at the end of the week; but with nothing at all coming in, of what avail would they be? And anything—anything—rather than that he should allow his life-insurance to lapse; for might not the lad marry, one of these days, when she herself had been laid to rest; and would not that be a necessary provision for the young wife?

These were the urgent problems he found himself face to face with as he left the breezy heights of the Castle hill and set out upon a meditative expedition along the unfrequented roads and paths in the environs of the town. He knew his way well; these were to him familiar haunts; he had even projected a little volume, to be called "Rambles Round Invernish." But now, as he followed the ascending and descending highways and byways that led through the undulating country, his brain was not filled with poetic reverie nor yet with the restless promptings of an indeterminate ambition. Sterner and immediate necessities were pressing in upon him. Even that glowing and tingling sense of freedom that had gone galloping through his veins had subsided now: liberty was all very well, but one might have too much of it. Was not man born to labour—and to shackles and chains? 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.' Well, he was not averse from that either. He

was no shirker of work. Nay, the imperative thing for him at this moment was to find work of any kind, lest he perish utterly, and the poor old woman up there in Dingwall became destitute in her old age.

So he blindly wandered on, paying little heed to his surroundings. Sometimes he would be deep down in the hollow of the woods, the overarching elms and sycamores causing a soft green obscurity, save where a shaft of sunlight pierced the dense canopy of leaves, to touch with a golden stain the mossy wall by the roadside. Or again he would be up on the higher levels, looking abroad over the cultivated uplands now rich with the yellow bounties of autumn, or getting an occasional glimpse of the wilder country in the south, where the mountains about Glen Urquhart rose pale and visionary into the silver and blue of the sky. But these were not what he really saw. It was South Africa he was staring at, in this rapt way—contemplating the varied opportunities it offered to a young fellow of firm physique, ready to turn his hand to anything, and not anxious to spare himself. Moreover, he had learned to stick on the back of a horse; and, if the worst came to the worst, was there not the Cape Mounted Police? And then South Africa in its turn faded out of those illusory dreams; he knew the old mother up in Dingwall would never consent. South Africa to her would be like a parting at the side of the grave. No; it was in Invernish that he must find something to do; and so of a sudden he dismissed these roving fancies; he wheeled round and set off for the town, resolved upon consulting Tom Grieve, who had seemed to him a friendly kind of man. He found the sub-editor in his own room; and told his story. Grieve's bright little black eyes regarded him critically and cautiously.

"And what are ye going to do now?" he asked.

"I am ready to do anything," was the natural reply. "But, if possible, I would rather not go back to the clerking. It's a poorly paid business; it's entirely overstocked; and it offers you no kind of future. But then beggars must not be choosers; I'm ready for anything; and I thought it possible you might know——"

"They say that when one door shuts another opens," observed the bilious-hued sub-editor, who seemed to be rather more circumspect and reticent than usual, "and it is

something of a coincidence that you should come here just now. Well, no, it is hardly a coincidence either; for I've had this conjunction of affairs before my mind for some months back; and the truth is I did once or twice think of you—though I was sweert to tempt ye away from a settled and respectable way of living to join the Ishmaelites. Maybe there was another reason—but we'll let that flea stick to the wa'. Now this is the way of it. Our Doctor here—Dr. Gillespie—has just gone red wild mad about golf since ever he went to live at Nairn; and if ye want him to write a leader, ye've to take a corkscrew before ye can get it out o' him. And as for the rest of the editorial work, he's been putting more and more of it on to my shoulders—not that I complain—not a bit: for it is his own suggestion that I should get an assistant——"

The twinkling black eyes glimmered with something of a humorous light.

"Will I tell ye the honest reason, then, why I hung back? Ye see, I've got a pretty snug berth here; it just suits me; and what for should I have some interloper coming in to learn the tricks of the trade, and maybe offering to do my work at a lesser salary? Where should I be then? I'm plain with ye, ye see."

Archie Gilchrist's frame began to throb with a strange anxiety.

"Do you mean that there was such an opening?" he asked rather breathlessly. "And that you thought of me in connection with it?"

"I mean that there is such an opening; and I mean that I am thinking of you in connection with it—if you like the work, and are satisfied with the pay. Come," said he, with a trifle more of his customary bluff goodnature, "I'm pretty sure you wouldn't be after any underhand play. I'll take the risk. I'll invite the cuckoo into my nest. If you can arrange matters with the Doctor, I am content; and if you take over the news department, and the reviewing of the magazines, then I should have so much more time for the leaders and the correspondence."

Here indeed was an amazing prospect!—the gates of the enchanted land thrown wide to him, in the most unexpected manner, and just when he had been contemplating all sorts and kinds of prosaic drudgery as his probable fate. He

could hardly reply ; it seemed too good to be true ; moreover, how was he to thank his generous patron for the measure of self-sacrifice on his part that seemed to be darkly involved ?

"If there was such a chance for me," he said, quickly (and striving to conceal his eagerness) "it would not be a question of pay. Oh, no ; I should only want what I could live on ; and a few shillings more for one that I am bound to. And if I could do the work at all, you would not find me remiss. No, nor ungrateful. I understand well that it is to your good offices I should owe the place——"

"Enough said—enough said," replied the sub-editor, in a large and tolerant manner, to his protégé. "We'd better get the business clinched at once. For a miracle the Doctor has come in to the office to-day—I'll take ye to his room."

Archie Gilchrist would much rather have had a little time to prepare for this momentous interview ; but at such an important crisis he durst not play the coward ; nervous as he felt himself to be when he was ushered into the proprietor's room, he was none the less determined to give as good an account of himself as he could. Fortunately this Dr. Gillespie—a little, pink-complexioned, silvery-haired man, rather foppishly dressed—did not seem a forbidding person ; nay, from over his gold-rimmed spectacles he looked in rather a kindly fashion at the newcomer, when the necessary introduction and explanation had been made.

"So you are 'Fairfax'?" he said. "'Fairfax' writes well, when he has a good subject : you are not always equally fortunate, perhaps. And if I may speak generally, I sometimes think there's a little too much hill and sky in your compositions. 'The proper study of mankind is man,' you know."

"He was a pretty poor specimen who said that," responded Gilchrist—for even in his desperate solicitude he must needs stand up for his opinions and his practice. "And these essays, Dr. Gillespie—these rambling, out-of-door essays—are merely a record of personal likings, and the impressions of the moment ; they don't pretend to be anything ; and really, if it comes to be a matter of personal

liking, I confess I would rather look at a range of hills than at a crowd of men. The hills would interest me more. They are more beautiful: they make better companions; they are silent—"

"Not so the extremely profanum vulgus, you would say," interposed the Doctor, with a bit of a laugh. "Ah, well, we need not discuss the question; for if you take this post, your own writings would only come in as *parerga;* they would be no necessary part of your duties—"

It was at this moment that Tom Grieve judged it becoming to retire: he foresaw that the topic of salary was imminent.

"The fact is," continued the Doctor, "I propose leaving the entire editorial control in the hands of Mr. Grieve. I know of no one better fitted for the position—except in one small particular. He is rather deficient on the classical side; I frankly tell you so—for he would just as frankly admit it. For instance, last week there came a Letter to the Editor signed 'Davus sum'; and perhaps in haste or inadvertence Mr. Grieve prefixed the usual formula; so that in the paper the signature appeared as 'I am, yours, etc., Davus sum.' Now I should like to have some one in the office who could keep an eye on such little mishaps as these—some one with a more general education and intelligence than the ordinary printers' reader; for we are supposed to be a literary paper: and it is annoying to find Goethe changed into Goëthe, or some such phrase as *vademeca* staring at you, when you open the pages at breakfast on Saturday morning."

Here Gilchrist had to protest that he was no philological encyclopædia: but he added that if a diligent use of dictionaries could guard against these errors, he thought he could manage. And in brief the terms of the agreement were amicably arranged: he was to begin his duties the very next morning; his hours were to be such as best suited himself and his work—except that on Friday night he would be expected to remain in the office until the paper was sent to press; and the remuneration for this entrancing labour of love was to be no less than thirty shillings a week. How he bade good-by to the estimable Doctor—who was hurrying off to the Nairn links; how he managed to re-discover the sub-editor's room, to express his

gratitude; and how he got out into the grey thoroughfares of Invernish, he probably did not know: he might have said, with the goodwife in Jean Adams's ballad, 'I'm downright dizzy wi' the thought—in troth, I'm like to greet.' And amid all this tumult and bewilderment of joy, what should he do but make straight away for the Post-office, to send a sixpenny telegram to Dingwall!

Sweet, sweet was the air in this Church-street of Invernish, as he sped quickly along: for to him it was an intoxicating atmosphere of liberty, and courage, and hope. Now definitely he could assure himself that he was no longer a slave and a drudge; he had entered on a profession—a profession that to his thinking was the noblest in the world. For what thing nobler could there be than the education of public opinion, that in its turn assumes the guidance of private conduct, that safeguards the national honour at home and abroad, and that keeps steadily on securing further and further enactments for the general well-being of the community? What thing nobler could there be than the curbing of the oppressor, the defence of the weak, the cultivation of patriotism, the spreading of knowledge and tolerance and amity among the peoples of the earth? No doubt here and there one could find a journalist who disgraced his calling; a devil's spawn of a creature, insensate and irresponsible in his malignity and envious hate; a secret assassin of reputations; perhaps even a hired and paid bravo. But the great mass of these myriad newspaper-voices—so this youthful enthusiast believed, at least—made for the betterment of mankind; there was a constant, if slow, amelioration in progress; the thoughts of men were being widened, towards charity and a fairer comprehension of each other's wants and aims. And he was proud to think that he also, in this obscure little corner of the universe, in his quiet way, might help. His heart was at this moment full of goodwill towards everybody. He resolved that if the "White Cockade" lass were to attack him again (as she was very likely to do) with her wicked flouts and jeers, he would not even endeavour to reply; her jibes and laughter, her Cavaliers and Jacobites might rule the roast if so it pleased her. And then again he reflected—as he was going into the Post-office—that if Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig should

by chance meet him in any one of these Invernish thoroughfares, and if she should honour him by the slightest nod of recognition, then no longer would he have to raise his hat to her with an inward and burning sense of shame. For no longer was he a clerk in Struthers's shop.

CHAPTER XI.

A MORNING CALL.

But not all at once was Archie Gilchrist emancipated from that terrible sense of serfdom that had eaten so deep into both body and soul. His nights were haunted. He dreamed that he had overslept himself by hours; that he was rushing with the keys in his hand along the streets of Invernish, in a vain effort to be in time; that the workmen were standing idly about the back entrance, jeering at him for having given them so much of an unexpected holiday. He dreamed that a stock-book, to be filled up by himself alone, had been added to the other books already so much in arrear; and the hopelessness of the task lay like a weight of lead on him, never to be removed. He dreamed that again he was being browbeaten and bullied by the little red-headed spitfire, Struthers, before all the other people in the shop, until in a madness of despair and rage he dashed an inkpot in the petty tyrant's face. Then again he could not sleep after four o'clock; but that was not much of a hardship; for he was more eager than ever after the acquisition of all attainable knowledge; and morning after morning found him strolling slowly and thoughtfully out to the solitude of the Islands, his books in his hands, around him the ever-new and strange and wonderful mystery of the dawn. The odd thing was that when the time did come for him to get to work, he felt ashamed. This was not work at all; this was play—and play of the most delightful kind. What could be more fascinating than to sit at a table and go through the monthly magazines, snipping out attractive passages, and prefixing his own critical (mostly approving) comments? Tom Grieve, who ought to have been his master, was nothing

but a goodnatured and considerate, if sometimes sardonic, companion. With no work, then, and no master, how could he accept his weekly salary and yet preserve a conscience free from compunction? On the rare occasions on which he met Dr. Gillespie in Union-street, he felt impelled to go up to him and say 'Can't you give me something more to do? I am not earning that money. If you like, I'll go out to Nairn with you, and carry your clubs for you all day on the links, and at night I can get through with my newspaper-work.' But generally the Doctor would stop and say a kindly word or two, pointing in the very opposite direction. 'You must not neglect your parerga, Mr. Gilchrist, among your mechanical duties. We cannot be responsible for putting Pegasus in chains, you know.' Chains? There were no chains! Instead there was a sense of freedom almost deliriously intoxicating, only that always there remained an undercurrent of fear that it could not possibly be deserved, and that it could not possibly last.

But if this labourer was so desperately anxious to prove himself worthy of his hire, there was now, and suddenly, sprung upon him a task from which he shrank back with something of dismay.

"Gilchrist," said Tom Grieve, knitting his brows over a proof, "I wish you would do me a service."

"Of course, then!" he answered—only too glad to have the chance.

"I think your 'White Cockade' friend is as rambling and discursive as yourself," continued the sub-editor; "and this time she has managed to drag in some moralisings about science and religion that would frighten many decent folk into fits. I don't like to cut out the passage; for amateurs are always sensitive; and besides, she's a fiery-tempered young wretch—at least, there's plenty of devil-may-care about her; and as likely as not she would go straight to the Doctor, and challenge him; and the Doctor is just daft about her; he would be down on me with a snubbing, without looking at the paper at all. Now if you would go and see her personally, and explain, and ask her to delete this passage herself: these things are so much more easily arranged by word of mouth than by letter—"

"You want me to go and call on Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig?" said Archie Gilchrist.

"Yes," proceeded the sub-editor, not observing any consternation. "And reason with her: talk to her like a father: tell her there's no use frightening decent, quiet bodies—"

"Will you show me what it is you object to?"

Grieve handed over the proof, on which there was marked a passage which ran thus:

'The philosopher hath said in his heart, There is no unjust suffering: it is only a disguised benevolence. And so a passing carpenter has his head cut open by a slate falling from a roof; he is carried to the hospital, where he endures immeasurable agony; he is incapacitated from work, and his wife and family are reduced to starvation. But if there were no unjust suffering, if the world were run on terms of strictly retributive punishment, the slate should have fallen not on the head of the carpenter but on the head of the careless slater who left it loose. The benevolence is so much disguised that, when one thinks of the carpenter's starving children, it looks remarkably like blind cruelty. No, no; if the existence of pain is a mystery, let it remain so; let us accept it as we accept other mysteries, with such faith in the divine goodness as is possible to us, according to our temperament and training; but do not let us have pseudo-science come in, with sentimental fudge about evolution being a kindly process. Evolution may work its will; and the devil may take the hindmost; but we cannot have our scientific guides persuade us they can introduce into their theory of the conduct of the universe any secret intention of benevolence; nor can we have them try to convince us that human suffering is necessarily merited by the person who suffers. Because such is not the case.'

Gilchrist smiled to himself: this young lady, whether her reasoning were coherent or not, could hit out. But he turned to Tom Grieve.

"Why, what's the harm in this?" he exclaimed. "She's on the side of the angels!"

"I am not learned in metapheesics," retorted the sub-editor, peevishly. "What I do know is that questions of that kind, whatever side she is on, are not fitted for a paper like ours; and I want you to tell her so, in as roundabout way as you can, and get her to cut out the passage of her own accord. And you'd better wait and see it done."

Well, this was a command from his superior officer; and he was not one to shirk service; so he put the proof in an envelope, and put the envelope in his pocket, and presently he was on his way to Glengarva House. He did not pause to ask himself whether this was a proper hour of the day to call upon a young lady; probably he did not know; in any case his mind was filled with other cares, for he could not but regard this delicate task he had undertaken with anythink but a vague apprehension. "White Cockade" was such a desperately sarcastic young woman, as he gathered from her writings; and he knew that his manners were uncouth; perhaps even speech might fail him. No matter: he must do his duty to the paper that had befriended him in his extremest need; and so he set forth—with his heart in his mouth.

At this same point of time Eelin of the eyes like the seawave was standing on the raised embankment overlooking the river—standing rather jauntily, her arms akimbo, her shoulders thrown back, her light summer clothing and a brisk southerly breeze conspiring to reveal the perfect outlines of her slim and symmetrical figure. In her face there was apparent a most friendly interest; for she was following a game of foot-ball that was being played by a band of young ragamuffins on the space of greensward just beneath her, between the footpath and the edge of the stream. They had no right to come there; and she could have got a perpetual injunction against them; but she liked small boys, even when the tatterdemalions had neither bonnets for their head nor shoes or stockings for their feet; and she had grown tolerant of their cursing and swearing, their continual quarrelling, and, what was still worse, their atrocious Low-country dialect and accent. It is true she did not understand the game: she could not make out, for example, why a player should try to bump the descending ball with his head; and then again her very spine shivered when she saw one or other of them kick that hard leather thing with his bare toes. But at least she surmised that the two bundles of jackets heaped on the grass represented the two goals; and she greatly enjoyed anything in the shape of a scrimmage; and sometimes she regretted that the wooden fence of the embankment intervened between her and these young rascals, for she would like to have lent a hand. She

was to lend a hand, on this particular morning, in an unexpected fashion.

For at length the game or series of games had come to an end, the losing side angry and scowling, the winning side indulging in taunts and jeers. But the most sullen of all the losers was also the oldest of the gang, a big, hulking lout of fourteen or fifteen who was known as Pate; and when Pate had put on his jacket, he all of a sudden gave way to the rage that was boiling within him, and straightway he fell upon a very small boy (goal-keeper, she guessed he was) and began to pummel him most mercilessly. The small boy simply threw himself on the ground, howling and crying, and vainly trying to shelter himself by clasping his hands round the back of his neck. This performance did not last long. With an incredible swiftness Eelin had sped away from her post of observation, had got round by the laurels, had got out by the gate, and was on the young ruffian ere he knew. She gripped him by the scruff of the neck, and hauled him off the small boy. Then she hit him a skelp on one side of the head. Then she hit him a skelp on the other side of the head. Then, as he retreated, she advanced upon him, still more vengeful and threatening.

"You sneak and bully!" she said, in a blaze of indignation.

But this retreat of his had not been without a purpose; for behind him there was a bed of shingle; and the next instant he had picked up one of the largest of the stones. He dared not hurl it at her face, for her fearless eyes confronted him; but he hurled it at her all the same, and savagely; and it struck her knee, so that a fire of agony seemed to shoot through her frame. Then, seeing that she involuntarily halted, he picked up another stone; and that also he was about to hurl at her——

But this was not Pate's day; this day there was no luck for Pate. Before he could throw the second stone he was unexpectedly attacked from the rear; his collar and another portion of his attire were seized by two powerful hands: and in another moment he found himself heaved into space—the short parabola he described ending in the shallows of the river Nish, whence he emerged spluttering and shaking his rags. Then the tall young man with the masses of shaggy flaxen hair, who had in this brusque

fashion interposed in the strife, turned to the more attractive of the two combatants.

"If I had a stick," he said, "I would thrash a lesson into that scoundrel. I hope he has not hurt you, Miss Macdonald——"

"Oh, no, not at all!" she said, with a little twitch of her lips.

"I have a message to you from Mr. Grieve, if you can give me a couple of minutes."

She tried to answer him civilly: but what her heart was calling aloud was this: 'Oh, do go away! Won't you go away! Won't you turn your face away! I am not crying. I am not a coward. I am not hurt. If there's water in my eyes it isn't because I'm crying. I am not a coward. If you would only go away, I could limp into the house and lie down.'

Well, she was not a coward; for she managed somehow to conceal the tearfulness of her eyes: and right bravely did she ask him if he would not come indoors in order to explain what Mr. Grieve wanted; and after the first step or two she found that her knee did not pain her so much after all. So he followed her into the house, and she led the way into the beautiful drawing-room, with its ferns and flowers, its dainty colours of decoration, its French windows surrounded by honeysuckle and hanging and swaying roses. To him it appeared a kind of fairyland; and surely no mortal ever entered fairyland with more of perturbation.

And yet, when he had with uncertain fingers taken the envelope from his pocket, and almost before he had fully conveyed to her the purport of his mission, she at once tried to relieve him from his too obvious confusion. She laughed the whole thing away with the utmost goodhumour. She even offered to draw her pen right down the entire column.

"No, I won't do that," she said, correcting herself; "for Mr. Grieve might think I was offended. And I'm not. Do I look as if I was offended? I will cut out just whatever you please; and perhaps you could show me how best to do it."

He had considered that question, too; and when she had brought over pen and ink and blotting-paper, he pointed out to her how the dangerous passage could be excised

without destroying the continuity of the article; and as he discovered she was not familiar with printers' terms and marks and usages, he directed her how to 'delete' and 'run on,' and so forth. In the midst of this engaging occupation the Bean-an-Tighearn made her appearance, wearing a light lace shawl over her head and shoulders, for she had been out in the garden talking with old Maxwell. For a moment she certainly looked surprised; but why should she have been astonished at any new freak on the part of Wild Eelin?

"Mother, dear," said the young lady, with great coolness, "Mr. Gilchrist has been instructing me in all sorts of curious things; and I've taken up so much of his time that I think we'd better ask him to give us a little more of it and stay to lunch. It's close on one o'clock."

The young man had risen to his feet, and bowed; he would presume no further than that, though he had been introduced to her on a previous occasion; but she on her part went forward to him with a most winning and gracious politeness, and gave him her hand for a moment, and said, "Oh, yes, I hope you will stay and lunch with us, Mr. Gilchrist." He would gladly have sacrificed a thousand pounds, had he had it, to have escaped from this dilemma; but he could not; some native instinct told him that it would be too great a discourtesy to refuse; and so, with what thanks he could muster, he accepted, and his hostess went and rang the bell and gave certain directions to one of the maids.

Now what followed was for Archie Gilchrist all a bewilderment and a consuming anxiety. He knew that pitfalls surrounded him, and that at any moment he might stumble to his destruction. To begin with, he was haunted by the consciousness that he had committed an initial blunder in calling at an untoward hour; he had intruded upon these people just as they were about to begin their mid-day meal. Then the clothes he wore: a work-a-day suit was all very well in the *Observer* office; he had never thought of the matter in coming away; but he did think of it, and desperately, now that he was about to sit down at table with the two ladies of the House of Kinvaig. At this moment a gong sounded. Mrs. Macdonald and her daughter rose to cross the room, and he considered he could

not do better than follow them humbly: the next thing he became aware of was that he had allowed his hostess to open the door for herself; and his heart burned with a bitter shame and mortification. Then again he had brought his hat into the drawing-room with him; so far he deemed he was safe; but now was he to leave it in the hall, or carry it into the dining-room, and place it under his chair? Merciful Heavens (he said to himself, when he caught sight of the laid-out table) should he have to carve? A wild-duck, for example?—and he had never been able to discover how the legs or wings of that animal were jointed into its infamous body. However, matters resolved themselves somehow; he found himself seated with his two companions; he accepted a piece of cold salmon offered him by one of the maidservants; and through a blessed inspiration he hit upon the idea that the silver knife and fork before him, not the steel ones, were the proper implements. In the distraction of this first minute or two, he was very nearly driven into a frank and honest apology. He was very nearly saying to her: 'Madam, as you see, I am quite unacquainted with the usages of good society; and perhaps I made a mistake in accepting your kind invitation; but I hope you will forgive me if I do or say anything wrong, and attribute it to ignorance, and not to presumption.'

He did not know Eelin's mother. From the moment she saw that the young man was embarrassed and nervous she set herself to put him at his ease; and this she did in a hundred little ways, with extraordinary gentleness and tact. For instance, when he was being helped to anything, her eyes were always called away somewhere else; so that if any trifling mishap occurred, it would pass without notice. Of course he was not an absolute savage. He knew to break bread with his hands, not his teeth; he kept his knife away from his mouth; he did not use his pocket-handkerchief where his table-napkin was more appropriately called for. But now the fun was about to begin.

For Miss Eelin also had noticed that he was sensitive and apprehensive; and she thought the best way she could come to his aid was to attack him boldly and put him on his mettle.

"So, Mr. 'Fairfax,'" said she, with gay effrontery, "I see you still quote with approval 'For a' that and a' that.'"

"Why not?" said he. "It is the poor man's Declaration of Independence."

"It is the poor man's Declaration of Impudence!" she retorted. "I am certain there never was any piece written that has done so much harm to the character of the people of Scotland, among the less-educated classes, at all events. It is nothing but an outpouring of mean and envious rancour. And look at the false assumptions, from end to end of it! Is it true that poverty is always so strictly honest, and always so sturdily independent? Is it true that a lord must necessarily be a birkie?—whatever a birkie may be: I'm sure I don't know. 'Wha struts and stares and a' that;' did you ever see a lord strut and stare? My small experience of people of rank is that they carry courtesy and modesty and self-effacement almost to an extreme: it is the vulgar upstart who asserts himself, and brags of his 'worth,' and inwardly hates any one who is better born or better educated than himself. 'Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine': and so those who wear silk must necessarily be fools; and those who drink wine must necessarily be knaves; and it is conceded that there are no fools and no knaves among the proletariat."

"Eelin, Eelin!" remonstrated her mother. "Why so argumentative? Mr. Gilchrist is not contesting anything you say."

"But I may," said he, grimly, "when Miss Macdonald has finished."

"Then see how Burns ate his own words," continued the intrepid young mischief-maker, "when he had been invited to dine with Lord Daer. He writes exultingly about the honour done him, and he describes his astonishment at finding his Lordship quite a modest gentleman—'the fient a pride, nae pride had he.' However, among all the mean and jealous imputations and self-conscious swagger of 'A man's a man for a' that,' there is one good couplet. 'The rank is but the guinea stamp. The man's the gowd for a' that.' That is an excellent conceit—quite admirable. It seems a pity it should occur almost word for word in Wycherley's *Plain Dealer;* and Gavin Hamilton was just the sort of person to have a volume of Wycherley's plays in his house."

This reprehensible stratagem of hers succeeded to perfection—for what Scotchman can sit silent and hear

Scotland's great peasant poet attacked?—and soon Archie Gilchrist had forgotten all about knife and plate and table-napkin and the ministrations of the maidservants, in his endeavour to combat this pert young iconoclast, and set her down. She took her punishment with the sweetest good-nature; and then she dexterously led him away into other fields of literature; and by this time all his shamefacedness had departed from him; he was at home in this conversation; he was talking of that he knew. And she induced him to tell them of his brief newspaper-experiences; and evinced much curiosity about the relations existing between Dr. Gillespie and Mr. Grieve and himself; while the Bean-an-Tighearn was always interested in anything that appeared to interest her daughter. When, in due course, after having had coffee in the drawing-room, he rose to leave, both ladies accompanied him to the door, and both were kind enough to ask him to call again and see them, when he chanced to have an idle afternoon. Then they returned to their couch-seat by the open window looking out on the lawn.

"Well, Eelin, you do pick up the strangest acquaintances," the elder woman said—but not reproachfully: there was not an ounce of reproach in her nature.

"Mother, I've told you before," responded the young lady, "you must not judge geniuses like him and me by ordinary standards. We are a law unto ourselves. And what have you to say against the young man with the lion's head of hair?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. He seems well-informed; and he was neither pretentious nor opinionated; and sometimes he forgot his shyness so far as to laugh. Oh, I have nothing to say against him; in fact, he rather interests me—"

"Mother, you shall become his patron!" the girl exclaimed. "You will have rescued a youthful genius from neglect; and the world will ring with your discovery. But as for this other genius—that's me—there will be no such luck." She sighed. "What is the use of being beautiful, and virtuous, and accomplished, and a genius as well, if you are unappreciated? When I sink into an early grave, you will all be sorry; but it will be too late then—"

"Eelin!"

The word was a cry of pain.

"What is it, Mummie?"—and in an instant her arms were round her mother's neck; and cheek was touching cheek.

"Don't say things like that, even in jest," she pleaded. "You don't know, Eelin—but they go through my heart like a knife."

"Well, then, I won't, Mummie; I won't indeed. And now come away into the garden," she continued, with all her usual audacity of cheerfulness, "and help me to get a basket of fruit for Mr. Allan Macdonald; and I'll take it along to him myself; and I'll have to sit and listen to rhapsodies about his wonderful son, the railway-king. The wonderful son!—I imagine the wonderful son has a pretty good idea of his importance in the world! However, he was respectful to you, Mummie; and I want to be kind to his father—the poor old blind man!—and if there's only one ripe apricot left in the garden, I know where it's going!"

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE BRAE POOL.

It was a wild morning in Glengarva—wild and dark and stormy; the occasional swift bursts of sunlight and the pervading and portentous glooms changing with the ever-changing landscape; fierce squalls from the mountainous regions in the west hurling down the strath, so that if the sturdy pines only groaned, and shivered, and straightened themselves again, the more fragile birches were blown and tossed about in every direction; while the slopes of heather, bending before the successive gusts, were like running waves. The river Garva, after the heavy rains of the night, galloped along in full spate; the tawny yellowish-white masses of water boiling and tumbling into the Rock Pool; but in the confined Narrows the current ran red, with long streaks of froth on its solid surface. Hither and thither went fluctuations of softened sounds, filling all the air: sometimes the long moan of the beaten and waving branches seemed to rise paramount in the gale; and then again that would partially cease, and the altered wind would bring with it the confused and half-melodious thunder of the distant falls.

Into the sombre day there came a spot of vivid colour: it was as if some tropical bird, some parrakeet, had suddenly appeared in this Highland wilderness when Lady Mountmahon stepped forth from the hall-door of Kinvaig House, her morning-gown of a brilliant grass-green satin, her Balmoral bonnet, with its eagle's plume, of a flaming rose-red, to say nothing of the canary hue of her hair and the too obvious and alien carnations of her cheeks. But if her ladyship was in gay attire, her temper was far from gay; her brows were impatient and sulky and angry as she glanced up and down the empty glen; and when at length

she started off for the river, she had not a word for the poor little French poodle, Tartarin, that trotted submissively at her heels. For the rest, she carried a blotting-book under her arm; and into her waist-belt she had stuck one of those pens that are furnished with a supply of ink.

She found her husband seated on a rough and steep bank overlooking the deepest part of the Brae Pool; and he was staring in a dull and aimless and besotted fashion at the heavy current that was roaring along and at the smoother water of an eddy that was just underneath his feet. He took no notice of her approach.

"Look here, Mounty," she said—and she spoke with a certain sharpness to make herself heard above the din of the flood, "are you going to sign this cheque or are you not?"

"Oh, go to the devil!" he said—and he resumed his hypnotic staring.

For a moment mortification held her silent; but presently her tongue was let loose on him.

"No, there's only the one way of screwing money out of *you;* and that's getting you into a mortal funk. Do you think I don't know why you keep those brutes and bullies up at the inn, feeding them on the fat of the land, and pampering them, and squandering bank-notes among them? Well I know! It's because you daren't call your soul your own. They're up to your games; they could peach; they could get you warned off every race-course in the country; and if you tried to cheek it out with them, they'd just take you and batter the life out of your body. You pretend to laugh at them; you pretend you have them here to amuse your guests; but you're shaking in your shoes all the time; when you get them by themselves, you fawn and cringe and toady: there's no difficulty when *they* want a cheque signed —a lot of drunken and brawling beasts!—"

"Oh, go to the devil!" again remarked the podgy and pasty-faced young man; and he continued his gloomy contemplation of the racing red stream and the deep black eddy with its fringe of saffron-tinted foam.

"And how do you suppose I can run this house without a farthing of money?" she went on, her voice becoming every moment more raucous. "If it was some idiotic whim of your own you would fling away thousands; if it was to secure you a gluttonous dish you could eat all by yourself,

you would spend ten thousand pounds on it: but when it comes to paying the tradespeople of Invernish, or a milliner's bill, or a wine-merchant's bill, there's not a sixpence to be screwed out of you. And every man-jack of the crowd you've got together here expecting to be served with the best—no matter whether they were born in Ratcliffe Highway or not! What are they here for, I wonder!—lying in bed all day, and letting the keepers go up the hill to get game for the kitchen. As for a salmon—here we are on the banks of a salmon-river; and look at the fishmonger's bill from week to week. Well, I'm sick of it. I'm sick of housekeeping when you're ashamed to look a tradesman in the face. Dawes and Mrs. Ramsden can do it between them: and you can amuse yourself by cursing them when things go wrong. There's not another woman in my position in England who would trouble her head about such things—and for such thanks! Why should I care what dinners are gorged by the crew you've collected here?—the riff-raff of the music-halls—"

"What were you yourself?" he said, contemptuously.

"When I was at the halls, I had some self-respect left," said she, unabashed, "and it's precious little of that I've got now. Well, I've had enough of it this time. You can let Dawes and Ramsden swindle you right and left: why should I care a hang? And if I can't get money to pay fair and square, then I know how it's to be got; oh, yes, I do: don't you mistake; all the money I need for myself I can get; and you, and your establishments, and your music-hall mugs, and your prizefighting pals, the whole lot of you may go to——"

She was just about to indicate the direction in which they might proceed, when unfortunately, at this very moment, the French poodle happened to jostle against his lordship's legs. An angry foot was shot out; poor Tartarin was precipitated down the bank; and the next moment it was splashing about in the back eddy, helplessly beating the surface with its fore-paws, and if anything rather receding from than returning to the shore. With shriek after shriek her ladyship flew to the rescue of her darling; she tried to reach out to it with her blotting-book, and failed; she frantically called to it, but it seemed to have no power to direct its movements; it only splashed and splashed with its paws, and every second

it was drifting nearer and nearer to the full volume of the spate, that would inevitably whirl it away to perdition. The mistress of the luckless animal perceived this danger clearly enough; she saw that her calling and calling from this part of the bank was of no avail; and so, as a last desperate resource, she rushed round the top of the eddy and made her way along a spit of loose shingle that here ran out into the stream; and again she tried to get near the drowning dog. What happened next had little to do with the poor lost Tartarin.

For this spit of shingle, swept and saturated by the rush of the river, was nothing less than a quicksand; and as she had not hesitated to plunge some way into the water, in her despairing efforts to recover her pet, she all at once found her footing giving way beneath her. The blear-eyed and bemused young man lying supine on the bank, who had been watching the fate of the doomed Tartarin with a certain obscure feeling of satisfied revenge, began to think that something else was occurring out there. Why did she scream in that unnatural fashion? Why had she turned her face to the land; and why did she wildly grasp and clutch, while all the time she appeared to be sinking and sinking deeper in that black hole? And then the two arms thrown up?—what did it all mean? Good Heavens, she had gone—the lapping black eddy and the wide, roaring river beyond were alike a blank! And even yet, in his stupor and amazement, he did not fully comprehend. But when, in another moment or so, some portion of her clothing and a struggling hand and head had reappeared on the surface some way further down; when he saw the next minute that the fierce red current had got hold of her and was sweeping her onward; when he heard a piteous cry—as it were a last cry of farewell—then of a sudden he seemed to become as one mad. He tore along the foot of the steep bank, over rocks and through bracken and brier and pendulous birch branches; and ever he kept calling to her; and then again he would distractedly shout and shout for help—his voice ringing far away and over the multitudinous lashings and surgings of the stream. And then his foot caught in a twig; at the speed at which he was going he could not recover himself; he pitched heavily forward, striking his skull on a stone; and for the present he knew no more.

When he came to himself, there was an old shepherd kneeling by him, and he felt something cold bound about his brow.

"Where is she?—where is she?" he said, as eagerly as his dazed condition would permit.

"Down at the foot of the Brae, your lordship," said the grey-haired shepherd, with a solemnity that the younger man had not the wit to perceive.

"Ah, that's right!—that's right! Come away and show me!" he said, hastily; and he began to scramble blindly along by the boulders and through the undergrowth of weeds and bushes. "What an escape! Poor Carrie! I will shoot that d——d dog if it ever turns up again!" he kept muttering to himself, as he pursued his way: and then he stopped short, and faced round. "Who got her out of the water?" he demanded.

"Me and the bit laddie that was with me," replied the shepherd. "I've sent him up to the House to tell them, your lordship."

"I know you," Mountmahon said, peering at him. "You're one of Sir Charles Orme's shepherds. You're the shepherd up at Lochletter. Well, now, my ancient friend, let me tell you this has been a good day for you—a rattling good day! I'll buy a farm for you: burn me in —— if I don't! I'll buy a farm for you, and I'll stock it from end to end, and I'll put money to your name at the bank——" and therewith he rapped out a number of oaths invoking curses upon himself if he failed to keep his word.

"It would be more seemly, your lordship," said the old man, in grave accents, "if ye would use ither language than that when ye are so near the presence of the dead."

He uttered a cry.

"What is that you mean?—what is that?" he said, as if he could not realise what the words meant; and then he turned and went quickly on again; and presently there came in sight a strange object lying still and motionless on the space of greensward between the end of the Brae and the river-bank. He took to running now—for the way was more open. His arms were stretched out in front of him. "Carrie!" he cried. "Carrie! Carrie!" And when he had reached that heap of sodden finery—and the pallid features—and the poor limp hands—he threw himself at

full length beside the dead body, with howls of self-pity, and ejaculations and appeals, and he passed an arm under her head to raise it, and he pushed back the wet hair from her face.

"Carrie! Carrie!" he called aloud, in a quite demented fashion. "Carrie, come back to me. Listen!—listen! The doctors will bring you through; the doctors will put you all right; I'll have the best in Scotland, if it costs me fifty thousand pounds! Carrie, can't you hear me! Open your eyes a bit! Carrie, pull yourself together, old lass: you never wanted for courage!" And then he turned to the shepherd. "Away, man, away to the House and tell them!" he cried, in passionate incoherence. "It's doctors I want—we'll save her yet—run, man, run—tell them the waggonette—no, the dogcart—gallop every mile into Invergarva—and telegraph—telegraph—telegraph! For the love of God, man, telegraph!—telegraph!—it's doctors I want—fifty thousand pounds to hear her speak a single word—run, man, run!"

"I have sent to the House, your lordship," said the shepherd. "Your lordship's friends will be here directly."

"Friends?—I never had any friend but her!" he cried, bursting into tears. "She is the only friend I ever had!" and again he flung himself prone beside her, with moans of anguish, and he smoothed the wet hair, and kissed the pale lips, and held her cold hand in his two hot ones, as if he would convey some life to her that way. When the men arrived from Kinvaig House, he had blubbered and sobbed himself into a state of utter exhaustion; he let them do with him what they liked; he protested no longer; he clung no longer to his frantic make-believe; he seemed dazed, and listless, and appeared hardly to know what was going on.

And then, in silence, and with every mark of respect, they placed the body on the litter they had brought with them; and there was a sheet, too, to cover her over, so that the poor, pitiful finery ceased to flaunt itself; and in this manner they slowly set out for Kinvaig House. And this was the dirge pronounced by the chief mourner, he walking at the foot of the litter, and not heeding whether his maudlin and self-commiserating utterances were overheard or no:

"She was the one that stood by me. She was the one that looked to my interests. The rest of them would have sponged me out of house and home, and robbed me right and left; but she kept staunch to me. If she had stood in with some of them, she might have made a pretty penny for herself—the baccarat nights, when there was a glass of fizz going—she might have made a pretty purse for herself; but she stood by me; she was too sharp for them; she would have chucked the whole gang rather than see me done. From the moment I took her from the halls and married her, she was true to me. She was honest to the bone. She looked after my interests first of all; and the skylarking was only to pass the time. If I had been as stoney-broke as a stable-lad gone wrong she'd have weighed in with her wedding-ring—that she would! And game she was: who would try to cheek her? Not one! They knew better—the whole crew of them. Carrie Milton—Carrie—all the fellows swore by her—a gay time it was. And now, poor wretch—for the sake of an infernal little devil of a dog: burn me in —— if I don't have him hanged to a tree if ever he turns up again! No shooting: a rope and a branch of a tree: and then he can kick his devil's dance in the air! And what is to happen to me now that Carrie Milton has left me! It's all over with me now! I give in. I'm finished. Carrie was the one to back me up. This will break me all to pieces. I'm no use now. Carrie was the one to stand by me—"

And so, with recurrent sobbing, and with tears running down his flabby cheeks, he continued these maunderings and self-pityings until the sad little procession reached Kinvaig House. The women of the party, frightened, hung back in the hall; but the men-roysterers came out to offer forced and awkward expressions of sympathy. He did not even regard them. He made his way through them; and went into the empty dining-room; and rang for his valet.

"Hutchins," he said, when that prim-looking person appeared, "champagne—and plenty of it. I will lie down here for a while. Keep them out. Plenty of champagne—I am broken to bits."

He threw himself on to a sofa by the window, and the valet, leaving the room, was absent only a minute or two; when he returned, he was accompanied by the butler, who

brought with him a tray and a couple of bottles of champagne and a glass, which with much ceremony he placed on a small table near the head of the couch.

"Steele, go away," Mountmahon said, peevishly. And then he struggled up, and drank two or three glasses of champagne, one directly after the other; and then he let his head fall back on the cushion. "Hutchins," he said, "I can't stop in this house. I'm not up to it. It would kill me. My nerves are gone." He drank some more champagne. "I can't stay in this house. As soon as I've had an hour or two's sleep, I will go off to Invernish. I shall be at the Station Hotel. Tell Dawes he must attend to the funeral. And send a message up to the inn, that I want Phillips and O'Rourke to come with me to Invernish. I'm not fit to look after myself. No—not you: only Phillips and O'Rourke. Have my things packed. And the waggonette about four." He managed to swallow still some more champagne; and again the short-cropped bullet head, with the pasty complexion now considerably flushed, and the gooseberry eyes all congested, fell back on the cushion. "Go away now, Hutchins," he said, somewhat drowsily. "I won't see anybody when I leave for Invernish. Not a soul. Tell them to go to the devil. Dawes will attend to the funeral—no use bothering me—everything right and proper—as swagger as he likes—everything right and proper—never mind the cost—never mind the—never mind—"

Then there was silence; and Hutchins noiselessly withdrew; for his lordship was asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

From the top of the Castle hill at Invernish, it is possible for one to discern—far away in the south, beyond the most distant undulations of the ever-receding landscape—it is possible for one to discern the square towers and little corner turrets of Westminster Abbey; but then there are conditions; to behold that incorporeal vision one must have the pulsating blood of four-and-twenty, and the imagination of a poet, and a brain all afire with wild schemes and dreams. Any ordinary mortal—not being a newly-emancipated draper's clerk, with vehement ambitions and wistful eyes—would on this particular morning have noticed nothing out of the common, except, perhaps, that the wide-stretching country looked unusually fresh and cheerful after the heavy rain of the night. For already, at this early hour, the skies had entirely cleared; the azure dome was without a speck of cloud; the trees were basking in the welcome warmth; and the blue river raced down between its vividly green banks, washing high along the grass, because of the swollen current. But those twin towers, spectral and pale, that rose above the dim horizon—silvery-grey they were, and ethereal, and ghost-like—appearing far away behind the wooded uplands, and far away behind the films of ultramarine that spoke of the mountains ranged about Glen Urquhart and Balmacaan: well, who but one of all the inhabitants of Invernish could summon up those phantasmal structures? And what lay between Archie Gilchrist and the famous shrine that seemed to stand at the very world's end? Why, at the best and happiest, nothing less than the desperate struggle of a lifetime, with all the chances of breakdown, and failure, and bitter renunciation.

But then, if there were success? If one could add one's name to the proud roll of England's writers? Other prizes might go to other men, and welcome: love, wealth, power, even the self-gratification of philanthropy—he coveted none of these; but to sleep through the centuries with the mighty dead, surely that were no ignoble rest, and in the meantime no ignoble aim, though one's existence were burnt up by the flame of it. The foolish lad!—some one ought to have told him to go back to his gallipots—or at least to his gum-pot, and his pair of scissors, and his snipping of paragraphs. But these early morning rambles, when he seemed as it were to have all the universe to himself, were strange and solitary things; and perhaps his head had been a little bit turned by his recent promotion; and after a night of persistent rain sometimes the air is astonishingly pure, so that quite impossibly distant objects may come within the sphere of one's sight. Westminster Abbey—for a recently-liberated draper's clerk? The madness of the desire was pathetic in its way. And this young man, with all his passionate hopes and bewildering aspirations, was very much alone.

And the divine mystery and wonder of love: was that also to be renounced—to be cut out of the perfervid imaginings of a youth of four-and-twenty? Yes, that also. The imaginings of a youth of four-and-twenty are rapid and eager; he had already constructed for himself the tragedy of his life: in his outlook how could there be aught else than tragedy? The 'belle dame sans merci' had smiled upon him, to his undoing; and she was free to work her will with him; and he would not complain. He indulged in no illusions. He was not likely to go to the poor old woman living up at Dingwall, and say to her: 'Mother, my worldly wealth consists of thirty shillings a week and a cartload of idle chimeras; nevertheless Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig has consented to marry me; and don't you think you should be proud of such a daughter?' On the other hand, when Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig, having amused herself for a while with this young newspaper man, should send him to the right about, would he howl and rage and call for revenge? Not at all. There was no trace of that arch-ingrate, Claude Melnotte, in the nature of the Invernish youth. Why, he had already

foreshadowed what was to happen to him and her in these hopeless circumstances; and the foreshadowing had naturally taken the shape of a bit of verse, for four-and-twenty likes to talk to itself in that way. He had even been at the trouble of dotting the final e's, so that when his pathetic piece should hereafter come to be published, the uninstructed might be guided into giving the proper pauses to the familiar French line:

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI.

Through sunlight, rain, and shine, and snow,
And ever so many a year ago,
What was it that she did to me,
La bellë damë sans merci?

No harm I did to her: a kiss
Or now or then were not amiss;
But to stab deep—ah, that was she—
La bellë damë sans merci!

And she goes singing on her way:
God send her many a happy day!
For heart-strings broken she must not see,
La bellë damë sans merci.

All this was a very pretty fancy, and could have done no harm to any one concerned, if it had stopped with the writing of verses; but here, on Invernish Castle hill, the hero of this undeveloped tragedy was engaged in asking himself at what hour that afternoon it would be proper for him to call on the two ladies at Glengarva House, and he was wondering whether he could induce Miss Macdonald to co-operate with him in a certain small literary project. He did not stay to reflect that there is such a thing as playing with fire.

It was about half-past four on this same day that Wild Eelin—who was not at all a 'bellë damë sans merci;' no, nor anything like that; Archie Gilchrist would have got nearer the mark if he had recalled the Shepherd's rhyme about 'My love's she's but a lassie yet'——

'She's neither proud nor saucy yet,
She's neither plump nor gaucy yet;
But just a jinkin, bonnie, blinkin,
Hilty skilty lassie yet.'

—well, Miss Eelin, finding herself alone in the house—for her mother had gone to pay a call, and most of the maids

had been allowed a half-holiday so that they might attend certain Highland sports that were taking place in the neighbourhood—Miss Eelin considering that she had worked long enough at the stitching of a blue-grey blouse that she was economically making for herself, thought she would get out-of-doors and have a little exercise. Just round the corner from her bower of honeysuckle and roses, and in the midst of a grove of tall beeches, there was hung a swing; and when she had comfortably seated herself, she forthwith proceeded to kick herself into the air. But she was a skilful performer; it was no ordinary feat she was bent on; and terrestrial aid was soon dispensed with, as altogether too ignominious. What she had set her mind on was to touch with her toes a certain projecting branch of a lime tree opposite her; and this she aimed at by means of the well-known trick—that is to say, on the backward rise she pulled herself up by the arms so that she was hardly seated at all, then when the chair came down again she shot out her legs horizontally, with a final upward spring as if she would fling herself to the zenith.

"Ah, but I will!" she was saying, with clenched teeth, as each time she went with a whizzing rush through the air, and ever and ever she was gaining a few inches, so that her up-thrown toes were getting nearer and nearer to the coveted branch. "Ah, but I will! Yes, if I break my back! I'll show Lily Neile what swinging is! She has never been within three yards of that branch. Ah, you beast, I nearly had you that time—well, now, this time—this time——" And again she went cleaving through the air, throwing herself up and out, as though she would pitch herself feet first into the Moray Firth or on to the top of the North Pole. "You brute, I was within an inch of you that time! But I'll do it—yes, I will—yes, I will!—if I break my back! I'll show Lily Neile what swinging is——"

And then she laughed to herself, in triumphant exultation; for at last one foot just managed to touch the outermost twig; and she knew that Lily Neile might be challenged and defied a hundred times over; for that twig Lily Neile never would touch, no, not if she fractured her spine in the frantic endeavour. And still the young acrobat continued this hurtling of herself through the air, for the

mere rush and exhilaration and impetus of the thing; and her garments were flying anyhow; and long ago her blue Tam o' Shanter had gone by the board, and her hair was tossing free; and she cared for nothing in life at all save the stiff backward poise, and then the terrific downward plunge, and the breathless swoop upwards again to the green leaves and the sailing heavens. And sometimes she touched the twig, and sometimes she did not; she hardly cared; she knew that Lily Neile was defeated out and away for ever and ever; and with no aim or object to distract her, she could now abandon herself to this wild animal delight of poising herself and then hurling herself down and up again to the skies.

Which was all very well; but of a sudden black horror seized her; for down there, by the corner of the house, appeared a creature—a man creature—with a tall hat, and a frock coat, and kid gloves; and apparently he had been piloted on to the scene by the great, big, freckled, red-haired, blundering-headed Morag. How Eelin Macdonald managed to retain her position on this little piece of timber it is impossible to say. If, in her fright, she had fallen, she would doubtless have broken her neck. As it was, the worst that happened to her was that she nearly tore the soles off her shoes on the gravel, in stopping herself; and then, with such dignity as was left her, which was not very much, and with blushing, and confusion, and nevertheless a kind of half-concealed giggling in the eyes, as of a school-girl caught, she went forward to receive her visitor. What she thought of the blundering-headed Morag cannot be recorded in print.

But her visitor was quite as confused as herself; for although he had consulted a Manual of Etiquette as to the proper hour and the proper costume for an afternoon call, that authoritative guide had not told him how to behave on finding himself confronted by a young damsel shooting herself through the air like a meteor entangled in petti-coats. And although she was very suave, and gentle, and courteous, he could see that her eyes were still occultly laughing; and he wanted to explain that he had asked for her mamma; and that he had been brought round into the garden through no wish or intention of his own, but simply by his following the fatuity of the Highland maidservant;

and he wished to apologise for his intrusion; and he did not know how to apologise, the predicament being so awkward; and the next thing was that he found himself seated in a garden-chair in front of a little iron table, and Miss Eelin Macdonald (still with her eyes self-conscious and darkly amused) was seated opposite to him, and she had sent the fatuous Morag for some tea, and she was listening gravely to the literary project upon which, to save himself from unendurable agony, he had at once entered.

And yet he was cunning. He began by saying that he had observed again and again, in the "White Cockade" papers, the remarkable skill with which she could introduce an incident, and make it effective; and he knew that he himself was helpless in that line; but perhaps with her kind direction—or co-operation, rather—the idea he had thought of might be carried out.

"Yes, and what is it, Mr. Gilchrist?" said she, most sweetly; but all the same she was thinking back, and inwardly praying and hoping that her skirts had been conducting themselves in a decorous manner, during her meteoric performances.

"Yes, that's just it—I don't know where to start!" said he; but in truth his main concern at this moment was the tall hat he wore. Why had not the Manual of Etiquette told him what to do with a hat in a garden? It would seem absurd to take it off and put it on the grass; and yet, on the other hand, how could he sit covered in the presence of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig? "Yes, that's just it," he continued. "I cannot construct. I don't know where to begin; and where to end. But I'm sure you could, Miss Macdonald; you would understand how to get the thing into shape; that I am sure of."

The literary project did not seem to form itself somehow. Her eyes were such inexpressibly beautiful things to look at; they were so deep and clear, and of such a wonderful dark sea-blue; and the black eyelashes gave them an indescribable pathos, and an intensity of interest, and a kind of strange inviting sympathy: it was no marvel that a young man's thoughts became somewhat confused. Nevertheless, he had to make a plunge.

"You take a doctor," said he.

"Yes?" said she: and those eyes of hers were so

distracting that he knew if he failed to win encouragement from them, the Devil's Kirn would that very night see an end to his sorrows.

"Yes, you take a doctor," he went on. But just at this moment she happened to put the tips of her fingers on the table; and the sight of them fascinated and dazzled him; for when had any mortal man beheld a hand so small and plump and white, with such exquisite filbert-shaped nails? The daintiness of them—and of the little fringe of lace at the edge of the blue-white cuff.

"You take a doctor—in a large provincial town," he said, with a desperate resolution: "and he has a very considerable practice; and all at once he is accused of a felony, and unjustly convicted, and sentenced to penal servitude——"

"Oh, yes!" said she—and she was following him now: she had begun to forget about her flying skirts.

"Not only that, but when the doctor comes out his friends will not believe in his innocence; one and all they cut him; his patients decline his visits; in fact, society is at war with him. Very well. In his indignation and rage he resolves on revenge. While he was in prison he made the acquaintance of a gang of burglars; and when they come out he goes and joins them. And then you see, Miss Macdonald——"

"Yes?—yes?"

Just Heavens, if only her eyes would leave him alone for a moment! His intellect was clear enough—if only she would leave him alone! And the literary scheme was simple, too—but for this bewilderment that sent all his senses woolgathering.

"And then a most astonishing series of burglaries begins in this provincial town. Some one seems to know the habits of life of each family—the dinner-hour—when the outer door is unlocked—how certain landings can be reached when the servants are engaged—the whereabouts of the principal bedrooms——"

"Oh, I understand—I understand!" she cried. "The doctor! Capital! Excellent!"

"Yes," said he, very much relieved, "but—but where would you begin the story? And what would the end be?"

"Oh, never mind the end at present," said she, gaily.

"Let's have the mysterious beginning—the unaccountable burglaries. And there must be a young woman in it somewhere, you know."

"I had no thought of that," he answered her, dubiously.

"Oh, but that is absolutely necessary," she contended. "A crime without a young woman in it isn't half a crime. Why, she must be the doctor's fiancée! Then her mother's house is to be broken into. Remorse seizes him. He knows she has angina pectoris, or housemaid's knee, or something that will suddenly kill her. He—oh, what does he do,—oh, Mr. Gilchrist, what does he do!—it must be something wild and splendid!—heroic, you know—he precipitates himself into—into—something; yes, he precipitates himself—into something; and then he dies—without a word of reproach; and she—what does she do, Mr. Gilchrist?—oh, at the very last moment she discovers he has been falsely accused—and unjustly condemned—and of course he mustn't die for just another minute, until she tells him."

She was far more nimble-witted than he; or perhaps it was the unconscious beguiling of her eyes that perplexed him into silence and listening; at all events on she went with her quick, disconnected, half-mirthful suggestions; besides which, she was pouring out tea for him, and offering him bread-and-butter, and strawberries, and the like. Poor lad, he was overwhelmed with shame. To think that Miss Macdonald should wait upon him—when gladly he would have crawled on the ground to serve her as a slave. But then the fool of a Manual had not told him whether it was his place to pour out the tea; and again her merry suggestions demanded respectful heed; and ever and always 'the stound, the deadly wound, Cam frae her een sae bonnie blue.'

And then the mother of this young lady appeared upon the scene, concealing her surprise with an admirable serenity and kindliness of manner; and she was most interested (for what interested her daughter interested her) in the literary copartnership; and she happened to indicate that if these two together could get a £5-note from some magazine editor for their tale about the doctor-burglar, she would be pleased to receive the same for her convalescent cottage at Nairn. And Archie Gilchrist, to himself, swore a sacred

oath that if any exertion on his part would procure the money, it certainly should be forthcoming. And then, somehow, his intoxicating and unnerving visit drew to a close; and both of these ladies were so gracious as to say they would be pleased to see him again, to discuss the further aspects of this literary venture. The poor youth! —he did not know with what fire he was playing; or how easily 'just a jinkin, bonnie, blinkin, hilty skilty lassie' might, without any intention on her part, become the deadly 'belle dame sans merci.'

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INNOCENT BETRAYAL

"THE grandest splore that me and David Haggart ever had together was when we was in Ireland," said Maxwell the gardener, with his mysteriously-twinkling eyes fixed on the large and impassive countenance of the Highland lass Morag. That impassive expression deceived him. She had had her instructions from Miss Eelin. She was deliberately letting the poor, swaggering evil-doer fall headlong into a trap.

"And were you not telling me that you yourself was Haggart the murderer?" she observed, without even looking at him.

"Sometimes I may have that black thinking in my mind; sometimes no," he answered her. "It's just accordin' to the transmotion o' souls; but that's a doctrine that's beyond ye, my braw lass. Ye've no the eddication or the introspection for that. But what I was saying was about the splore that me and Haggart had in Ireland. Ay; that was something, I promise ye! Ay, ye never heard o' the like, I'll bate ye! Me and him we got on new toggery; and we picked up twa blones—but ye'll no ken what's that——"

"Maybe I am knowing very well; and maybe I am not; but if it is anything wrong I will speak to my mistress," said Morag, severely.

"Ye idjit, it's jist twa lasses!" said he, with scorn. "And if there's onything wrong about them themselves can tell best, I jalouse. Ay, and off we set in a jaunting-car, with a boy to drive us; ay, and we was a whole month drivin' through Fermanagh, and Cavan, and Derry—a hundred and ninety pounds it cost us. And a' pleasure,

woman!—no a stroke o' business the hale time; from end to end I never put my form into a single keek-clog."

And now his face grew darker; and his eyes were twitching still more nervously.

"But I'm saying: listen to this: that was naething to Downpatrick—Lord save us, that was naething to the awfu' goings on in the jile at Downpatrick! Me and some more lads locked up in one o' the cells fand out that there were fancy blones in the next cell; ay, and what did we do then? When the three days' provecsions had been served out to us—for that's the wye they do there—we tore up the pavement and blockaded the door; ay, and then we broke through to the blones; and then we barricaded their door jist the same. Oh, what a debatch that was!—twa days o' terrible, terrible debatchery! The like o't was never heard o' in any jile in the kingdom——"

But now was Morag's chance.

"You are boasting of it a great deal, but I am sure it was nothing at all!" she said, with open contempt. "No—nothing at all! What do you understand about wickedness—why, nothing at all! Do you know what I am? Will I tell you what I am? I am a crib-biter!"

She stared him full in the face, to his utter bewilderment; and then she turned and fled, and went down into the housemaids' room, and flung herself into a chair. Her pent-up feelings were too much for her; her convulsive mirth broke loose; in successive paroxysms of laughter she dashed her fists on her knees; and again she thought of the frightened gardener, and again she beat her knees, and screamed and roared and laughed, and rocked herself until her face grew purple, and tears were running down her cheeks, and her big mouth seemed capable of swallowing several clothes-pins. For Morag did not perceive a joke frequently; but when she did she made the most of it; and besides she had the virtuous consciousness of having amply fulfilled Miss Eelin's instructions, in terrifying the sham Haggart. When at last she wiped her eyes with her apron, and endeavoured to recover herself a bit, she was already trying to think how she could glorify and magnify the tale in relating it to her young mistress.

Meanwhile Miss Eelin, forgetting all about the mischief she had planned, was striding along the river-side path

leading into the town; and she was reciting to herself, with the most tragic pathos vibrating in her voice, the sorrows of Callum-a-Glen:

> 'Was ever old warrior of suffering so weary?
> Was ever the wild beast so bayed in his den?
> The Southron blood-hounds lie in kennels so near me,
> That death would be freedom to Callum-a-Glen.
> My chief they have slain, and of stay have bereft me,
> My sons are all slain and my daughters have left me;
> No child to protect me, where once there was ten,
> And woe to the grey hairs of Callum-a-Glen!'

Yes, the most tragic pathos was in her tones; but all the same her heart was just bubbling over with gladness and the animal joy of existence; and she approved of the sunshine that lay warm on the greensward of the Castle hill; and she watched with keenest interest the proceedings of certain kittiwakes that had come in from the Moray Firth to flap and preen themselves in the shallows; and at odd moments she experienced a malicious triumph in thinking that she had subjugated her old enemy, "Fairfax," and that he was now humbly anxious she should collaborate with him in literary ventures—he being a real, actual, professional journalist, too, and not a mere amateur like herself. And so she swung along; and the woes of Callum-a-Glen in no way interfered with her buoyant carriage or with the frank audacity of her demeanour; and in a remarkably short space of time she found herself in Church-street, and at the door of the hotel in which Mr. Allan Macdonald took up his quarters each time he returned to the town.

She only wished to leave a message for him; it was to the effect that General Mallock had been so good as to offer him, through her, another day on the Laggan stretch of the Nish; and would he communicate with the gillie? But just as she was about to address the landlady, whom she knew very well (as she knew nearly everybody), she found herself confronted by Angus the late water-bailiff, who had come downstairs to see what letters had arrived by the mid-day post; and he so plaintively besought her to pay a few minutes' visit to the old blind gentleman that she consented, and forthwith followed Angus up to the sitting-room, where she discovered Mr. Macdonald seated at an open window, hearkening to the various sounds of the

street, and no doubt making mental pictures of the scene without. When Angus, giving him the letters, informed him that here was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig come to see him, the stately white-bearded old man rose instantly to his feet, and advanced a step or two, and found her hand, and held it, patting it a little in affectionate acknowledgment of her kindness, while he listened to her pretty speeches as if there were music in her voice, which indeed there was.

"Two such things to happen to me in one day!" said he, when they were seated. "A visit from you, and a letter from my son. I knew it by the seal when I touched it a second ago."

"But if you would rather go through your letters, Mr. Macdonald," said she, at once, "don't let me interrupt you —I can call some other time—"

"Oh, no—oh, no!" he said, quickly. "I cannot part with either of my pieces of great good fortune. Somerled's letter must wait. Unless—except—well, you have seen the fellow—you might be a little bit interested, too—if you would be so very kind as to read it for me."

"Oh, certainly," she answered him, without thinking; she knew that he was extremely proud of the young railway-king, and guessed that he might want her to know of his great doings. So, when the old man's fingers had selected the letter with the seal, and when it had been handed over to her, she broke it open and proceeded to read it aloud, without a moment's hesitation.

And indeed all this farrago, as it seemed to her, of extension lines, connections, guarantees, fusions of companies, and the like, appeared quite ordinary and commonplace; it was as if she were reading the newspaper to him, which she often did; only that throughout the letter there was a distinct tone of satisfaction, while the old man's brief ejaculations from time to time told how pleased and vain he was over the courage and enterprise and success of his son. Something different, however, was about to happen.

'And now, my dear Dad,' she went on reading aloud, 'the question remains, What is to be the outcome of all this, supposing everything goes well? To what end—to what end? For whom or for what am I toiling—when you have all you want, and more? The mere amassing of wealth for its own sake is an ignoble kind of performance;

and I have no wish to buy a baronetcy. But you remember the time you and I walked up to the Islands? We stopped at a well. Is it called the Sweet Well or the Priest's Well? —tell me in your next letter: it is a day to be fixed in the memory, for many reasons. Then I revealed my project to you. You called it midsummer madness. You talked of bewitchment or beglamourment. But there is no bewitchment or beglamourment here, amongst all these business affairs. And every day I seem to see more clearly that that very midsummer madness might be the crown of a man's life. And not a vainglorious one either; not the building of a church or chapel, or getting your name put in stained-glass windows, or public benefactions to pose as a philanthropist. Only a small thing quietly done; and the doer of it to remain for ever unknown. I suppose to every man in his life there comes the one chance; and this would appear to be mine. You need not talk of glamour and witchery; I am thousands of miles away; and I think the scheme might turn out to be feasible—though for the time being it would break me financially, of course. Well, never mind about that; for who would be prouder than yourself —and who would be prouder than the Macdonalds of Ontario—and the Macdonalds all over the world indeed—to hear that the family of Kinvaig were back in their old home in Glengarva?"——

The tall, blind old man was listening with so intense an eagerness that he had forgotten the situation; he had forgotten that he was allowing the girl to blunder into the discovery of his son's great secret. It was she herself who shrank back, in alarm.

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald, I can't read this!" she exclaimed. "I'm afraid there's something—something private—I don't know what it means."

"Yes, yes," he responded instantly, as the truth broke upon him—and he showed as much trepidation as herself. "Give me the letter, please! I will explain to you, my dear young lady—there has been a little mistake—a little mistake—I thought he would be writing only about the railways. But there's no harm done—no, no; for I will explain to you——"

His fingers trembled a little as they received back the compromising document; and for a moment or two he

hesitated. No doubt he was casting about for some plausible story to get him out of this desperate strait. "You see, Miss Eelin, this is the way of it now: if you knew Somerled as I know him you would understand that in the commercial affairs that make up the most part of his life he is shrewd, practical, matter-of-fact, hard-headed—ay, just as hard-headed as any one could wish; and yet all the same there is a streak of romance in his nature—under the surface, as it were. And maybe he and I may have been talking some nonsense—at the well out there—about the Macdonald clan, and Glengarva, and so on; and he has been brought up to have a sentimental regard for the old place, I'm not denying that; and some fancy may have taken possession of his head, for the time being—like enough, like enough. But—but, Miss Eelin, I would not pay too much heed to such chance talk; and if ye will forget that I was so imprudent as to show you the letter: and—and I'm sure you will never mention a word of such a thing to any one——"

"Never—never," she said, earnestly. "Never to any human being."

He seemed greatly relieved by this definite promise; and he proceeded to distract her attention with quite a number of wholly different subjects, perhaps hoping that the slip he had made—through the unfortunate accident of his blindness—would entirely pass out of her recollection. But it is not so easy, however willing one may be, to pass a sponge over the slate of memory: and when Eelin Macdonald left that hotel her face was graver than its wont; she almost seemed afraid; her customary audacity of manner was for the moment gone. What had the younger Macdonald meant by witchery and glamour? What had he meant by the return of the Kinvaig family to Glengarva? And then she remembered her promise; and she determined she would forget—or else treat the whole thing as an idle phantasy, as a bit of 'midsummer madness,' in short; and as the easiest way to secure this oblivion was to address herself to the actual and immediate duties of the hour, she now, first of all, went along to Mr. Forbes, the station-master, to arrange with him about a third-class compartment for the return of one of her convalescents from Nairn.

At this same point of time, in the refreshment-room of

the station, an unusual scene was being enacted, which was not visible to the odd stragglers about the platform because of the folding doors having swung-to. At the further end of the place were Lord Mountmahon and one of his prize-fighting bodyguard: at this end were Arty Hoskins and another of the bullet-headed, broken-nosed fraternity, and these rival factions were pelting each other with all sorts of missiles—buns, cakes, sandwiches—anything they could snatch from the counter. The barmaid at the further end was cowering in a corner, terrified out of her life at the riot that was going on; but the barmaid at this end was in a fury of indignant rage, because she had been hit on the cheek by a box of chocolates.

"Will ye stop that now?" she cried. "Will ye stop it? I'll have in the police at ye!"

But the podgy and pallid-faced nobleman at the head of the apartment was enjoying this mirth immensely; he encouraged the fray, because so far he had escaped unscathed; and gradually there was less discrimination in the choice of projectiles, until at last his lordship's bowler-hat was half knocked off his head by a heavy pair of sugar-tongs. The pudding face paled, partly with anger, and partly with fear.

"Who flung that?" he demanded—and the scrimmage quieted down. "That was you, Arty. By ——, that was you, Arty—"

"I'll take my oath it wasn't!" cried the music-hallish young man with the cadaverous complexion. "I've stuck to this tin o' biscuits, blime me if I 'aven't!"

"Then it was Conky—Conky, by ——, I'll brain you sooner or later." He turned sulkily to the barmaids. "Here, what's the damage? Don't look frightened out o' your wits!—did you never see a bit o' fun before? Take that for the bloomin lot!" He threw a couple of sovereigns on to the counter. "Come along, lads!—or shall we have one more drink?"

"I'll not serve ye, sir—no, I'll not!" said the barmaid who had lost her temper. "We're not allowed to serve people that are either drunk or mad."

He scowled at her, but said nothing; and then he and his companions pressed open the folding doors and the motley crew tumbled confusedly out into the stony and hollow-sounding station.

Just then Eelin Macdonald came forth from Mr. Forbes's office, and proceeded to the entrance. Perhaps her glance fell upon this rowdy gang: perhaps it did not; at all events her proud Highland air betrayed no consciousness as she passed on. But the effect on Lord Mountmahon of this sudden apparition was astonishing.

"Who's that? Who is she?" he exclaimed, in a loud whisper. "By ——, she's a clinker! Eyes like an ox—and the long lashes—and see how she walks! I must find out her name! I must get introduced to her! Come along, Arty, and we'll see who she is!"

And then and there he was for eagerly following her; but Hoskins gripped him firmly by the arm and held him back.

"Mounty, behave yourself—behave yourself, man!"

It may have been an accident; but the portion of Mountmahon's sleeve that his companion had grasped was the black band that denotes mourning. It had been there for a matter of ten days.

CHAPTER XV.

'BUT TO STAB DEEP.'

THE relations that were gradually growing up between Archie Gilchrist, late draper's clerk, and now assistant sub-editor of the Invernish *Observer*, and the two ladies at Glengarva House, were certainly peculiar; and even the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn, largely tolerant as she was towards anybody or anything that interested or amused her daughter, began to look on with a little misgiving.

"You know, Eelin," she observed one morning, "I would not say a word against your friend, Mr. Gilchrist. He seems to me a most amiable young man; and he is clever and well read and anxious to be obliging. Undoubtedly he is all that——"

"'But,' mother; now is the time for the 'but,'" said the younger lady.

The mother blushed like a girl of fifteen; she did not like to find fault, or make objection.

"Well, Eelin—would you—would you say—he had quite the appearance of a gentleman?"

"I know he is a gentleman at heart; and he has the manners of a gentleman," replied the girl, undauntedly. "He is modest and unassuming; he has an instinctive sympathy and consideration for others; and do you think I am going to judge of him by the shape of his coat? It is true, he might get his hair cut; I will grant you that, Mummie; but I've told you again and again that geniuses like him and me prefer long and wild hair; and anything —anything in the whole wide world—is better than to be similar in look to everybody else."

"Now, Eelin, answer me this," said the mother. "Would you introduce him to Lily Neile?"

The great dark-blue eyes stared out from their black lashes; nor was her astonishment feigned.

"Lily Neile? She would be honoured! Give me the chance and I'll show you!"

She got the chance before she could have expected; for that very afternoon Archie Gilchrist called; and he had brought with him a synopsis of the burglar-doctor story; and they professed to be quite charmed with the idea of the literary co-partnership, and quite eager to follow the outlines of the little tale. Moreover he appeared to consider it would be rude of him to leave while they exhibited this curiosity; and perhaps out of courtesy towards him they may have somewhat exaggerated their interest; at all events, this strange and unaccountable young man with the riotous flaxen locks stayed on and stayed on, and there was no sign of his going. How could there be? How could he tear himself away from glamour-land, and from this all too enchanting companionship? Look even at his material surroundings, out here in the garden. As the evening drew on, the woods across the river were darkening in their cold intensity of green; but all the overhead heavens were a blaze of soft, pale, rose-pink clouds borrowing their glory from some unknown region out in the west; and this splendour of colour was mirrored on the oily waters of the wide stream, with here and there a fretted touch or thread of silvery blue-grey. As for the silence, if Little Isabel of the Bannocks had uttered the faintest cry, over yonder on the leafy heights where she was cruelly slain, they could have heard it; for indeed the stillness of twilight was stealing over the world; and even the birds were hushed. No, he could not tear himself away—while the lady with the sweet voice was talking gently to him, and while the younger lady with the bewildering eyes was looking at him, sometimes mocking at his suggestions, sometimes volunteering her own.

A low whistle sounded, and was once repeated. With a word of apology Eelin left her companions, walked across the tennis-lawn, and glanced over the outward-sloping fence. Just down below her two young ladies were standing in the roadway.

"Hallo, old crock," said one of them, familiarly, "how are you? Going to do a mouch?"

"Nan, your language is distinctly inferior," observed Miss Eelin, in severe tones.

"Come along, old girl! Lily Neile means to fish all the way down to the Devil's Kirn; and we can sit on the bank and watch. We'll go round by the Islands, and be there in a sec."

"Not to be done—I have a visitor."

"Oh! A him, of course. Ta-ta, then. So long!"

After this secret colloquy, Eelin returned to her place at the little garden-table; and as the unconscionable young man showed no signs of departing, she got it into her head that she would like to see how long he would stay; and so she deliberately began and talked and talked—tales of herself and her experiences at home and abroad—all kinds of things of the most heterogeneous nature—while the puzzled mother could not make out what malice or mischief was afloat. And what was it she did not say to him?—and he could not be so ill-bred as to rise and leave while she was doing her best to entertain him! Nay, the unfortunate youth forgot all about time and circumstance, and could only listen and listen, while 'those eyes of blue,' as the Russian song says, held him, and were working his destruction. She described to him, for example, how when she was a very young girl she and her mamma were walking along the Corso Vittorio Emmanuele in Palermo, and an old flower-seller came up and asked her to buy one of his bouquets. "How much?" she said. "A franc," he answered. "Oh, I'm sorry I can't afford it," she said—her schoolgirl funds being limited—and then she turned away. But just at this moment two Italian gentlemen were passing, who must have overheard; for one of them immediately purchased the bouquet, and brought it to her, and said "Will Mademoiselle permit me the honour of presenting the flowers to an English young lady?"—and he handed her the bouquet, and walked on with his friend.

"Now," observed Miss Eelin, when she had come to the end of this blood-curdling recital, "a Highlander would no doubt wish to be as polite as that; but he wouldn't have the self-possession—"

"No, nor the franc," said her mother, demurely.

And so the mischief-maker rambled from this to that; and meanwhile the rose-red had left the sky; the mystic

grey of the twilight had stolen into the world; there was a strange metallic sheen on the surface of the river; and now and again an orange ray would shoot through the foliage on the opposite heights, where a public gas-lamp or a window in one of the houses had been suddenly lit up, to remain there, a steady golden star. And then into the phantom-world there crept silently and slowly a phantom white boat, and there was a phantom grey lady noiselessly plying a salmon-rod, the line of which was invisible to them. There was something ghostly and eerie in the presence of that solitary and spectral fisherwoman; it was a sort of unsubstantial pageant out there in the gathering dusk; and for the moment Wild Eelin stopped her chatter, to look on.

"It's Lily Neile," she said, almost in a whisper. "She's just coming to the Devil's Kirn."

But at this very moment she was recalled to herself; for there came out into the pervading silence the muffled thunder of the gong in the hall: and she knew that she had wrought her wicked will; and that she had inveigled this poor young man into staying right on till dinner-time. And she wondered what her mother would do now. But the Bean-an-Tighearn was not to be disconcerted by the tricks of a brat of a school-girl.

"Mr. Gilchrist," she said, with the utmost simplicity of kindness, "won't you come in and have a bit of dinner with us? There is no ceremony, of course, living by ourselves as we do."

The hapless youth was dumbfounded: the sound of the gong had told him that again he had blundered, this time worse than ever; and how was he to make his excuses and get safely away? Then Eelin, with a sudden return to her usual frank generosity, came to his help.

"Yes, do, Mr. Gilchrist!" said she. "Take pity on two lone women. It's all my fault that we have kept you. It would be so awfully kind of you. And I'll call in Lily Neile to make a fourth. Fergus can take a message home for her, and come back and wait for her. Lily!—Lily!—I want you! Give up and come ashore!" Her voice went echoing through the gloom; and presently they could dimly make out that the black figure in the bow of the boat was hauling at the cable, while the shadowy craft crept stealthily

along, dividing the steely surface of the stream. And in a few moments here was Lily Neile—a blithe and debonair lass, who seemed to take matters pretty well as they came; and she accepted the invitation at once; old Fergus was sent off with a message; and these four made their way into the dining-room, ready to welcome whatever kind of impromptu banquet could be procured for them.

And indeed it was a merry meal, with even something of brilliancy and charm about it. For by this time Archie Gilchrist had found his wits; and he considered it his duty to interest as best he might these companions of his; and whether by accident or design the ladies of Glengarva had given the talk a bookish turn, so that he had his opportunity. At first Lily Neile regarded this strange young man with a mild astonishment: he was so different from the young men she was in the habit of meeting. His eyes, for instance, had no repose in them, no complacent and self-satisfied unconcern; they were quick, apprehensive, and eagerly responsive; and in his anxiety to please his brain seemed to go at sixty miles to the second. And then again those large grey eyes would glow and burn, until she began to say to herself 'Perhaps this uncouth young man is a genius! Eelin Macdonald is always picking up odd kind of folk—semi-lunatics and people like that.' And all the while the unfamiliar young man was discoursing, and answering and assenting, and sometimes advancing iconoclastic paradoxes, just to keep things lively. He maintained that the popular ear was more correct than Milton's, and that 'To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new' should be recognised as the standard reading. He said he was perfectly certain that Shakespeare wrote

> 'Golden lads and lasses must,
> Like chimney-sweepers, come to dust,'

and that the mauling of the song in *Cymbeline* was due to some prompt-book copier. He contended that Tennyson had no right to alter, in the later editions of his poems, lines that in their original form had become the permanent property of the English-speaking peoples. And so on; his memory seemed inexhaustible; and he talked with vivacity and nerve; while the grey eyes glowed and burned, glancing from the one to the other of his audience. Lily

Neile sate silent, and curious. This was not the kind of talk with which the young man of the day, as she knew him, favoured his acquaintances. But presently it occurred to her that she, too, must be literary; she must help to keep the ball rolling. So she said—

"Eelin, I could give you a fine story to introduce into one of your 'White Cockade' papers."

"Yes?"

"I once had a pet donkey——"

"Most girls appear to like to have some such creature trotting about after them," observed Miss Eelin, with a philosophic air.

"I mean a real one," said Lily Neile, indignantly; "and the most beautiful little animal you ever saw. He began his life as a baby moke in a pantomime. Then, when the pantomime was over, he was given to some friends of ours. They could do nothing with him, so they gave him to us. We could do nothing with him, so we sent him to the farm bailiff to keep for us till he should grow up. We were living in Surrey at that time. He did grow up, and then began his adventures, for nothing could keep that animal in—neither fence nor hedge nor anything. One day he jumped over into a washing-green and munched up a whole lot of table cloths and curtains. Then naturally he got ill, and the vet.'s bill was something awful. Then when he got well he resumed his careering about the country. I won't tell you all his escapades—it would take a week; I'll come at once to the tragic climax. He managed one morning to draw the Surrey staghounds off the proper scent; and the moment he discovered he was being pursued, off he set—over gates and stiles and hedges and ditches—with the pack in full cry after him. There never was such a run! People talk of it to this day—but rather with bated breath, you understand—I mean those who were engaged in the chase. Somehow they don't seem altogether proud of it, although it was distinctly the run of the season. And not a sound did my beautiful Jim—that was his name—not a sound did he utter, not a single bray until he had enjoyed as much of the fun as he wanted; and by this time he had got to a fine and picturesque position—the front of a spinney on the crest of a hill; and there he faced right round and surveyed the

whole scene, the baffled hounds, the infuriated huntsman, the mortified Master, and the amazed and straggling crowd behind them; and then he shot out his forelegs, and gave a prodigious *hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw!* It was the run of the season—it was indeed!"

"Oh, Lily Neile!"—that was all the comment Eelin offered—but she looked reproachfully at her friend.

"His name was Jim," remarked the young lady again, by way of final and absolute corroboration.

Then when dinner was over they all of them returned to the drawing-room; and Lily Neile played Rubinstein's Melody in F—and played it very well too; and that ferocious young Jacobite, Wild Eelin, went away into the corner where her harp stood, and there she sang to them

'O gin I were a bonny bird,
Wi' wings that I might flee,
Then I would travel o'er the main,
My ae true love to see;
Then I would tell a joyfu' tale
To ane that's dear to me,
And sit upon a king's window,
And sing my melody.'

And there were one or two more pieces and one or two more songs; and a certain youth sate in a sort of dreamland, his nerves all tingling with rapture, and wonder, and a vague and aching fear that such an evening would never happen to him again. But of a sudden something more dramatic occurred, and for a moment it almost seemed to him—waking out of his trance—that he must become the defender and champion of three easily-alarmed and gentle ladies. For the door was opened, and there appeared a man, accompanied by a black collie. The man was a short, tightly-made person in knickerbockers of homespun; and his weather-tanned features and the staff that he carried bore a suggestion that he was a shepherd or a keeper, and of quite respectable mien; but that there was something wrong was evident, in a pathetic kind of way, from the perplexed and anxious manner in which the collie kept looking up at his master's face. The newcomer gazed in a mystified fashion all round the drawing-room; and of course Archie Gilchrist neither spoke nor moved—for this stranger might have come on business; but when Gilchrist, happening to glance towards the Bean-an-Tighearn, saw that she was overcome with dismay, he

instantly jumped to his feet, with the intention of throwing the intruder out by the front door, which he very easily could have done. He did not know Eelin Macdonald. There was not much alarm visible in her expression. On the contrary, she interposed, and put Gilchrist aside with a slight gesture of authority, and went up to the man.

"Well, good friend, what can I do for you?" she said, in the most unconcerned and amiable fashion.

He regarded her with his bemused eyes; and now the collie had turned to look up at her, as if wistfully appealing to her for help.

"There are the three wyes," said the shepherd or keeper, and he spoke slowly and solemnly, "of dalin' with Russia."

"Yes?—and what would be your way?" she inquired.

He regarded her again for a moment or two, in a mysterious silence. And then he shook his head, mournfully.

"I'm telling ye—there's only the three wyes."

"Yes?—and what would be your way of dealing with Russia?" she again asked of him in an encouraging manner.

She might as well have questioned the collie.

"There's only the three wyes," he repeated, darkly.

"Look here, my friend, I'll let you into a secret," she said, in a burst of confidence. "For you there's only the one way—and that's to go home and go to bed. Don't you see how troubled your dog is about you? Don't you see that he wants you to get home? Where are you bound for—the town, or out into the country?"

"Ay, well, the town. Bit about Russia now——"

She put her hand on his arm.

"I say, you come with me, and I'll see you safely down the steps—they're rather dark at this time of night. And if it was stupid of the servants to leave the hall-door open, and you came in to ask about Russia, indeed there's no harm done: only, I must see you safely down the steps, you know, and we'll talk about Russia some other time."

She led him away, and he went with her quite obediently, the collie following closely behind. She took him through the hall, and guided him down the steps, until he was safely on the gravel path.

"Now mind you don't go near the river. Keep to the road; and go to bed as soon as you get home. And we'll

talk about the three ways of dealing with Russia when we next meet. Good-night!"

In the dusk he paused for a moment.

"Good night, your leddyship," he said—for something seemed to have impressed him: perhaps her quiet air of authority—perhaps her English way of speech. "I hope I wass not doing anything wrong."

"No, no, not at all! Good-night!"

So she saw him on his way; and then she went back to the drawing-room, to soothe and comfort her trembling mamma.

"Miss Macdonald," said Archie Gilchrist, "if you had allowed me, I think I could have saved you all that trouble."

"Oh, yes," she answered him, laughing. "I know. I know what you would have done. But, you see, there are the three wyes; and my wye is the best wye."

* * * * *

Early next morning, while as yet the grey and golden and purple dawn had not wholly declared itself above the wooded heights, Archie Gilchrist was out at the Islands, that were now as solitary and silent as death; and he was pacing slowly along the winding paths that led through successive wildernesses of shrubbery, under the over-arching limes and sycamores. Perhaps he had not slept much during the night; perhaps he had not slept at all; for there are occasions that leave haunting memories, demanding that every glance and word shall be recalled, with anxious fears lest this or that phrase may have been misinterpreted. It was only in a mechanical way that he looked abroad over the wide-glancing river, whose continuous murmur seemed to speak of distant things: and it was with unobservant sight that he regarded the objects near him—the narrow channels with their tea-brown current—the hanging bushes of ash and alder—the smooth avenues through the undergrowth. But presently he came to a more open glade; and here he sate down on the grassy bank, opposite a long weir over which the broad stream came foaming white and loud; and in a vacant sort of way he gazed, and continued to gaze, at the rushing water—while the new day stole into the awakening heavens, and the hills in the west came out of the night.

Within the range of his vision there was another object, though he did not deliberately look at it—nay, he rather

avoided looking at it: it was a house of red sandstone, away on the other side of the spacious stream, and further down; rather a picturesque house, amply adorned with ivy, and surrounded by trees and garden and tennis lawn, adjacent to the open fields, and overlooking the river. At one corner on the first floor there was a window consisting of two arched partitions; they were so far away from him that each section hardly seemed to have more than the breadth of a half-crown. That was Eelin Macdonald's room; he knew it was so, because she herself had described the view from it; and he knew also that sooner or later the white blind would be raised. No, he did not look that way; and yet somehow his eyes were conscious of the narrow and arched partitions, and the little iron balcony beneath, with its glow of scarlet geraniums and yellow calceolarias. Sooner or later the white blind would be raised; and the time was drawing on; there was sunlight now on the red front of the house, on the ivy, on the black araucaria, on the brilliant garden-plots. He felt himself an intruder, a spy—even at this great distance; but there was a strange fascination and compulsion that held him there. Unknown to himself, he now and again shivered a little; perhaps the wind blowing up the Great Glen—from the regions about Loch Ruthven and Castle Urquhart—may have been a trifle cold.

And then he rose and walked away home, something sick at heart, and hopeless. And this he had forgotten: not once during all these long hours had he given a single glance towards the south, to see whether the visionary towers of the Abbey still rose pale and silvery-grey and phantasmal beyond the soft green uplands.

CHAPTER XVI.

'THERE CAM' A YOUNG MAN.'

"How do you do, Mrs. Macdonald? May I have the pleasure of introducing to you my friend, Lord Mountmahon?"

The speaker was a tall, elderly person, with a livid skin, a little white moustache, and cold grey eyes: his name was Major Forres, and he had achieved some measure of distinction in his day, outside the limits of his own profession, for, as war correspondent, and generally under the influence of whisky, he had blustered and lied all over Eastern Europe; though now he had retired to his native county, to bluster and lie on golf links and at afternoon teas. The Bean-an-Tighearn disliked him; Eelin hated him; but none the less his assurance gave him the run of the house, especially when, as on the present occasion, he had some favour to demand.

The potboy-looking younger man—who was very smartly-dressed, with a red begonia in his button-hole—advanced to the two ladies, and there was a most ingratiating grin on his rotund features; and his manner was not at all bad. And although his eyes went back again and again to Eelin Macdonald, with an open admiration that needed no other avowal, it was to her mother that he had the tact chiefly to address himself.

"You see, I've often wished to call on you," said he, with an easy self-confidence, "if only to make an apology. Upon my word, I never think of you, or hear your name mentioned, but I consider myself an interloper. I do, indeed. Why should I be in Kinvaig House, and you here?"

"Oh, but that is an old story, Lord Mountmahon," said the elder lady, with a gracious smile. "And I am sure you had nothing to do with the sale or the purchase of the estate,

You are merely the tenant under Sir Charles Orme, as any one else might be; and besides, when one sells anything, one may regret the circumstances that compel the sale, but it would be rather unreasonable to blame the buyer."

"Oh, that's all very well," said he, doggedly; "that's all very well; but one has got a conscience, don't you know; and I feel myself an interloper; and I wish to apologise. If there is anything I can do—you just say the word and I'll do it. I'm not a bad sort, as you may have heard. I like a little fun; but where's the harm in that? I want to do the right thing; yes, I do. And look here, now; sometimes you come to Glengarva, to lend a helping hand to some of the old people. Well, then, why not make use of Kinvaig House? Do you think I will inflict myself on you? Oh, but I won't though! I'll turn every man-jack out of the place; and we'll put up at the inn; and Miss Macdonald and you and your maid and your coachman can have the house to yourselves, just as long as it suits you. Of course, I would leave the servants. There's no one else now to receive you—no one else now: you must have seen in the newspapers what happened——"

"I am sure we were most grieved to hear of that terrible accident," said Eelin's mother, in her sympathetic way—though it was difficult even to mention such a thing.

"Oh," said he, lightly, "it was just my luck. I have the most awful luck. I was born like that. Still, we must tide along, don't you know. Little use sitting down and folding your hands. A good old wholesome weep may be a comfort to you ladies, now and again; but a man hasn't time. There's things to be done. There's the everyday work of the world. You've got to eat your dinner, whatever happens; and that's what I call common sense. No use fretting. Up and be doing is my motto. You only live once, and you've got to make the most of it. It's only kiddies who cry over spilt milk. Very well," he continued, in his brisk and cheerful and chirrupy manner—and now it was to the younger lady he had turned, with a bold and audacious gaze that considerably abashed her who was not readily abashed. "Look here, Miss Macdonald, I would like to get up something for your amusement—something that would amuse your mother and you; and I have got a notion. Not my own, of course; some other fellow did it. I forget who he was; never

mind ; wise men invent ideas, but wiser men make use of them ; and I'm not particular to a hair. It's this kind of thing. You know where the Highland line comes through the Drumouchter forest, up beyond Dalwhinnie : it's a pretty lonely neighbourhood, that is : one could have one's skylark without the risk of many spectators being about. And when I say I want to amuse you, I mean it ; I don't confine myself to a twopenny-halfpenny picnic, with champagne-cup gone flat and earwigs crawling about the dishes : my idea is to do the thing slap-up or let it alone. And if you'll let me drive you from Kingussie, I'll get a proper turn-out, you trust me ; and you needn't be afraid to put yourselves in my charge, for I can take a team along. Yes, I can. I don't like to boast, but if there's one thing I have at my fingers' ends it's the handling of the ribbons. See me in Bond-street of a July afternoon—half-past four—just at its crowdedest : a smart four-in-hand—lively horses—a pretty woman on the box—and you would say I could run that machine to rights. The Major will bear me out. Can't I do it, Forres ?"

"You can, Mounty, you can," said the saturnine person with the cold grey eyes. "His lordship, Mrs. Macdonald, is a capital whip ; and more than that he has an excellent regard for the safety of his own neck ; so you need not fear he will throw you over embankments."

"But—but—I don't quite understand the proposal," said Mrs. Macdonald, rather bewildered.

"Oh, I'm coming to that," continued the bullet-headed and crop-haired young man ; and Miss Eelin, resentful in her maiden pride, was glad that for the moment he had ceased his too familiar scrutiny of her features and form. "Yes, I'm coming to that. For what are ordinary amusements ? Nothing ! They're amusements that don't amuse—not one little blooming bit. They're all played out. Well, I've been thinking. You may say it isn't a habit of mine ; but then I don't profess to be one of the clever Johnnies ; and that's so much to my credit. And when you can get your thinking done for you, by paying a penny, or three pennies, for a newspaper, what's the use of your bothering ? Let the other fellows think ; they earn their living that way ; and a deuced good living too, I'm told—their broughams, and their dining with Archbishops, and their shoots in Norfolk : entertaining their friends as if they

were to the manor born—manor, d'ye see—manor, not manner—Gad, I don't so often make a joke that I can let it be missed—"

"Awful old, Mounty," said his companion.

"Never mind. Good vintage. Improves by keeping," rejoined his lordship, with perfect complacency. "And this is what I mean to do, Miss Macdonald: I mean to buy two railway-engines—rather a costly performance—but it's no good sticking at trifles. You only live once. Two railway engines; I'll have them taken up to that lonely part of the line; and I'll have them separated by about a mile; then full speed ahead—and the engineers jump off:—and the two engines come at each other like two bulls. That will be something to see! I think you will be impressed. I think you will be struck—"

"I hope not," said Eelin's mother, looking down.

"Oh, I don't mean that way. I'll take care of you ladies. I'll have a platform erected on the hillside. I'll keep you out of harm. But the crash will be something for you to remember. It will be something recherché, or I'm a sinner. Most people who have seen a railway collision have lost a leg or an arm in consequence, or got themselves eternally busted to bits; but here you sit in your arm-chair and look on; you've nothing to fear; you watch the two engines come careering along—and then there's the tremendous bash, as if the whole universe was knocked into smithereens—"

Of a sudden his lordship stopped. Eelin's black cat, Beelzebub, had come noiselessly in at the open door. Mountmahon stared, in a suspicious manner; then he winked his eyes twice, and stared again; but when he saw Miss Eelin catch the animal into her lap, and begin to stroke it, he appeared to be reassured, and resumed.

"Yes, I think that will be something rather splendid: the two iron bulls coming full speed at each other, and then the terrific smash, and splinters flying to the skies, and the roaring of the steam. Rather neat. Rather recherché. What do you say, Mrs. Macdonald?"

"You may amuse yourself with the fancy, Lord Mountmahon," Eelin's mother answered him, "but of course you could never really contemplate such extravagance and waste."

"What I want I get," said the pudding-faced young man, with all the firmness of which his features were capable, "or at least I make an amazing good try." And then again he turned to Eelin, staring at her all over as he spoke. "And when it's to pay a compliment, or to give pleasure, to one's friends—one's particular friends—I try a hundred times harder, you may take your oath on that. And I generally succeed. Yes, I do. I generally manage. I've got a way, you know. He'll never be happy till he gets it, like somebody's soap; and I generally get the soap. Now, what do you say, Miss Macdonald?—or will you forgive me if I ask you what your Christian name is?"

Miss Eelin did not, or could not, reply; she was disconcerted; her dignity was wounded; to have her Christian name demanded by a stranger, and that stranger impudently staring at her?—why, it was like asking her to tell the colour of her stockings. And in another moment she would have burst into tears—so angry was she at finding herself scrutinised, and helpless. But the gentle mother intervened.

"My daughter's name is Eelin, Lord Mountmahon."

"Ah, that's much better!" said his lordship, with a happy air. "Miss Eelin—that's much better! Miss Macdonald—why, it's universal—it's like Miss Smith. Well, Miss Eelin, that is what I am willing to do for you. I'll get the two engines; and I'll pay the Highland Company for any damage done to their line. They'll look after themselves, never fear. The most grudging and disobliging line in Great Britain. Now the Aberdeen is what I call a friendly line; I always try to do them a good turn when I can; but then, don't you see, I want you to have this spectacle up in the wilds, with no onlookers. And if you have a fancy for a pavilion on the hillside, it shall be there. I'll see you through. I'll do the thing proper. You only live once. And what's twenty bull-fights to a crash like that, and the heaving up of iron, and the roaring of the steam? I'll do it. When I want a thing, I get it—or I must know the reason why. Well, Miss Eelin—yours is a pretty name—you won't mind my saying that—oh, monstrous pretty! Well, Miss Eelin, what's your answer? Are you on? I'll do it. Rather splendid, you know, up there in the wilds—somewhat recherché—just a bit swagger

—when the two roaring iron bulls come tearing along—that's what I'll do for you, and I can't make you a fairer offer."

And where was the wildness of Wild Eelin now? She was embarrassed, self-conscious, almost distressed; her chief concern was to get away from this young man's too ardent inspection.

"Oh, if you please, Lord Mountmahon," said she—and she was confused, and bashful, and downcast—not the least bit like her usual self—"if you would please to leave me out; I know I should be too nervous and frightened—perhaps my mother would be more interested."

"Come, come," said he, encouragingly, "I am not going to ask you for your Yes or your No all at once. Young ladies are shy—I know their ways. Think it over. I'm staying in Invernish at present, and if you'll allow me, I'll look in now and again, and try to persuade you. It's a great scheme, mind. It's worth considering. I wouldn't undertake it for anybody else—no, not much! But there it is. There's my offer. It's at your disposal. And I would take it as an awful favour if you would consent, I would really. I'm not good at blarney, you know; but I mean what I say. I'll do the thing slap-up—yes, I will. And if there's any trimmings you can suggest, they'll be added on—or I'm a Dutchman. And don't decide all at once. Think it over. And when I next give myself the pleasure of calling, there may be a more definite Yes or No; but I hope it will be a Yes."

He took his hat in his hand, and rose, and turned to the elder lady.

"And remember, Mrs. Macdonald, whenever you think of visiting Glengarva, Kinvaig House is at your service. I mean it. I'm not much of a talker; but I mean what I say."

And so, with sundry compliments and grins—and with a final effort to meet Eelin's eyes with his own that he might convey a message to her—he withdrew, accompanied by his cadaverous friend; and mother and daughter were left to themselves.

"Well, Eelin," said the former, with some humour in her look, "you would appear to have made a conquest this time."

The girl sate silent, her heart thumping within her. All her highly-strung nervous temperament was in revolt—against she knew not what. She was frightened; and ashamed to be frightened; and ashamed to show her mother she was frightened. At last she said indignantly—

"What made Major Forres bring that man here?"

"But—but what have you to say against him?" responded the mother, in astonishment that was perhaps a trifle feigned. "Perhaps his lordship does not seem very clever or accomplished; and perhaps he talks a good deal about himself; but the world is made up of all sorts. You must learn to be charitable, my dear Whirlwind. You'll find it a most useful quality—more and more so the longer you live. Of course everyone knows that Lord Mountmahon associates with rather a peculiar class of people—at times, at all events; or it might be more generous to say hitherto—for who can tell what influence the tragic trouble he has passed through may not have had on him? And perhaps there may have been exaggeration in the common talk; at all events, if they make excuses for him by calling him a creature of impulse, this afternoon he showed himself a creature of very munificent impulse—"

"Smashing two railway engines together!" said Eelin, with disdain. "Are we children, to be attracted by such folly!"

"Still, there was the intention, you know," the mother remonstrated, in her pacific way. "It isn't everyone who is quick to invent. He wanted to do his best to interest you."

"I hope he won't darken our door again!" said Eelin, with proud lips; and she rose from the chair quickly and impatiently, as though she would throw all recollection of this visit behind her. "And now I am going into the town, to see if old Mr. Macdonald is at his hotel. Perhaps he will come out for a walk; and I'll bring him here, mother; and I know you'll be kind to him. And the atmosphere of the house may be clear by then!"

Thus it was that George Reginald Talbot Fitz-Ingram Taylyour, Marquess of Macmahon, made the acquaintance of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig. 'Who is she? Who is she?' he had exclaimed, in breathless admiration, when he saw her come out of Mr. Forbes's office. Well, now he

knew who she was. But who was to tell him what she was? For there were so many answers to that perplexing question.

'Oh, Wild Eelin?' her girl companions would have said. 'Why, she's just a brick! She should have been a boy! And the way she waltzes—she's as strong as a young pony, and as light as a butterfly; she just carries you round the room: it's like a dream!'

The young men would have been less enthusiastic.

'Oh, Eelin Macdonald? A shade too clever for some of us. Takes the measure of you, don't you know. Writes for the newspapers, and that sort of thing. Devilish handsome, all the same.'

But the one who knew her best had different thoughts about her. In the passionate hours of the night, when reason had relaxed its hold, the mother would cry to herself,

'Eelin—my Eelin—what is to become of her? She is a fire—a flame—she is so eager, and sensitive, and keen; she will burn herself out unless she has some strong man by her side, to steady her and control and protect her. And if that is not to be—if she should meet with a great disappointment—if it is as a flame that her life is to burn itself out—then, dear God, let me go too! How much of agony could I endure after being left alone? Surely three days is the most that could be expected of me! Almighty Father in Heaven, if you have mercy, make it two days! Or one—or one—surely twelve hours of that loneliness would kill me: ah, welcome death—the kindness of death!' And so the dark hours of the night would be shaken with sobs.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

SURELY never in all the world was a literary co-partnership carried on in more enchanting circumstances: golden afternoons, with the sunlight flooding the spacious green-sward of the tennis-lawn; the garden plots brilliant in purple, and white, and scarlet, and yellow; shaded seats (for earnest consultation) under the spreading limes; and then the promenade along the river-front, overlooking the pink-grey shingle and the shining breadth of blue water stretching over to the leafy heights beyond. This young Gilchrist foresaw his ruin; and rather courted it; so demented was the lad. He was bewildered by her eyes, as the sea birds are bewildered that dash themselves against the glare of the lighthouses on the wild Atlantic nights. And the belle dame sans merci 'went singing on her way,' without thought of harm. Why should there be harm? She was eagerly interested in these literary projects. The doctor-burglar story was proceeding apace. Then he brought her the monthly magazines, for her perusal and opinion; and her smallest hint, of approval or disapproval, waxed large when it came to his writing out. How little did the ladies and gentlemen who were strenuously calling attention to themselves in these periodicals imagine that their pathetic efforts were being adjudged upon during idyllic conferences under the great black araucaria, while the wide stream murmured as it swung along, and the soft winds blew, and the honeysuckle was sweet in the air. No doubt the Invernish *Observer* could hardly be regarded as a supreme authority; nevertheless, type is type; and there are agencies for snipping out and forwarding to these anxious aspirants any newspaper mention of them. The

tragic thing is that no similar agency exists for guaranteeing that none such paragraphs, of whatsoever kind, shall enter a private person's house.

Then he had grown less shy and apprehensive in manner; modest he always was, and desirous to please, but his glance was not now so painfully alert; in short, he was feeling a little more at home; while his extensive reading and his judgment in bookish affairs gave him a certain position. Moreover, he had incidentally been introduced to one or two of Miss Eelin's companions and to their occupations and diversions; Lily Neile, for example, would bring along her brother; and these four (when MSS. and magazines had been deposited on a window-sill) would make experiments in croquet—a game that had just been revived after sleeping peacefully for a generation. And the favouritism shown by this young newspaper-man—and the wild excuses he had to make in consequence! If Eelin and he were on opposite sides—for some such distressing arrangement would occasionally happen—and if she were lying in a good position at her hoop, and if he could easily have gone down and driven her away, he would deliberately do something else; and then as a kind of afterthought he would by way of apology say to his indignant partner, 'Well, yes, perhaps I ought to have gone down to her.' And then the intentional misses—when it was Eelin who was his enemy! Lily Neile was a most good-tempered, not to say a hilarious, lass; but sometimes she got angry, or pretended to be angry.

"You two," she said, one afternoon, to her chief girl-friend, "ought always to play on the same side, and then we might have an honest game. He simply won't croquet you! It's disgraceful. See how I am handicapped!"

And then Archie Gilchrist, suspecting that remarks were being made about him, came up blushing and confused, and stammered forth an apology.

"Did you ever see any one play so badly? I'm not sure that the lawn is quite even just there. The roots of that lime-tree may run a long way underground—"

At which Lily Neile burst out laughing.

"The roots of a lime-tree!" said she. "Mr. Gilchrist, you know perfectly well that you deliberately missed that ball. I saw you do it!——"

"Yes, you saw me miss the ball," said he; "but the intention is a very different matter——"

"You are always playing into her hands: it isn't fair," contended the irate damsel (but she was giggling, for she saw that Eelin did not like this too open accusation). "And next game I must have my brother for my partner; then you two can nurse each other as much as ever you like."

The awkward feature of the whole situation was this, that these two, Archie Gilchrist and Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave, had for a long time back been alternately love-making and jeering at each other in the columns of the Invernish *Observer;* but now, when the Saturday came round, "Fairfax" was discovered to have grown exceedingly respectful, as if he were addressing a real person. Eelin promptly perceived the danger.

"Mummie," said she, with a copy of the paper in her hand, "I can't have this at all, you know. If Mr. Gilchrist is to come here, he must understand, and remember, that 'Fairfax' and 'White Cockade' are quite imaginary people —who never existed; and the way they have been talking at each other has also been quite imaginary—of course—certainly—obviously—quite imaginary—quite——"

"Are you only finding that out now, Eelin?" the mother asked, with calm scrutiny. "I told you long ago that all that farrago about assignations at the Islands would become rather compromising if you were to meet the young man in actual life——"

"Ah, but I won't have it!" said Eelin, with unusual perturbation. "There must be a distinct understanding. All that nonsense that has been going on was between two ghosts; and has nothing to do with him or me. Of course not! And if 'Fairfax' chooses to be timid, and complimentary, and courteous, why, it's his own look out!" she continued, with more spirit. "I'm not going to spare him—not I! I will hew and hack at him! I will cure him of his John Knoxes, and his Fairfaxes, and his Cromwells——"

"Oh, no, you won't, Eelin. He seems to me a most amiable youth——"

"Now there you are again, mother!" the girl cried, with some little touch of shamefaced colour. "You are

assuming that the newspaper people and the real people are one and the same; whereas they are not—and never could be. The young man who comes here is a very nice, quiet boy, as distant in speech and demeanour as could be wished; and besides he is so very clever, and well-informed: why he can tell you everything! Very nice, and very interesting. Only, he must distinctly understand that he has no relationship with me handed over from 'Fairfax'—however respectful 'Fairfax' may choose to become."

"I thought you might find some difficulty," said the mother, regarding her.

"Oh, no, there must not be," the girl said, with decision. "There must be a clear understanding. I will tell him, the very next time he comes out, that 'Fairfax' must remain 'Fairfax': a very slight hint will be sufficient. For, of course, I don't want to quarrel: he himself is really a very nice boy—such an interesting companion—so unlike other young men: don't you find him so, Mummie?"

"Oh, I like him well enough," the mamma said, rather more cautiously: the whole position of affairs puzzled her.

Nor was it quite so easy as Eelin had thought to warn this young Archie Gilchrist that he must in nowise consider himself to be the inheritor of the rights, privileges, and immunities arrogated to himself by the imaginary "Fairfax." For the real young man never presumed one hair's-breadth in that direction: on the contrary, although she had got to be in a measure dependent on his advice, he was careful always to preserve a certain attitude of deference—to Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig. And how could she complain that the ghostly contributor to the newspaper should be showing himself respectful to her other, and ghostly, self? The only way to clear up this somewhat perilous atmosphere was for 'White Cockade' to attack him boldly in print. She would show him what she thought of his William the Thirds! She would sound the gathering of the clans; and fight the old battles over again; and lament fallen fortunes; and raise her glass to him beyond the seas! There was to be no more fanciful love-making; no preconcerted meetings out at the Islands; no secreting of envelopes in the first ash-tree east of the Priest's Well. Who was this 'Fairfax,' with his Whigamore sentiment, and his 'Declaration of Impudence' 'A man's a man for a'

that?' At all events she would make it clear that his extreme courtesy was wholly thrown away upon the person signing herself 'White Cockade,' who was resolved to maintain the freedom of her opinions and prejudices and habit of speech as unrestricted and inviolate as ever.

On one of these golden afternoons Archie Gilchrist—the real and actual person—walked out to Glengarva House; in his pocket there was the completed story of the doctor who, to revenge himself upon society, joined a gang of burglars. It was rather a wild afternoon: during the previous day and night there had been rain up in the hills, and now the river was roaring down in purple spate; moreover the blustering gale from the south-west had not subsided; but Miss Eelin had pegged down and erected a canvas tent between the black-green araucaria and her honeysuckle bower; and in this sheltered nook her mother and herself were able to follow their usual occupations, while at any moment they could look abroad on the swinging current, on the row of trees that were tossing and straining their branches in the gusts of wind, and on the brilliant garden-plots, where the nasturtiums, and carnations, and asters, and pansies white, purple, and pale yellow, were driven down by the breeze, and would then recover themselves, and sway, and bend, and become erect, in rather a joyous manner, in the successive floods of sunlight. And here it was that Archie Gilchrist found the two ladies; and they greeted him with a most kindly welcome; they gave him tea, and cake, and fruit; and they begged him to read to them the conclusion of the doctor-burglar story, with which they professed themselves delighted. As for him, their praises did not cheer him much. He was rather down at heart. The cessation of co-partnership, so far as this little story was concerned, seemed to foreshadow the end. He had been too fortunate. He had been placed on too friendly a footing. Well, if he was to be relegated back to a distant acquaintanceship, he was not going to repine or reproach—certainly not the latter. He would accept with submission; and be grateful enough for what had already been vouchsafed him. For he was not a presuming lad.

Of a sudden the glare at the mouth of the tent was darkened by a figure; and a maidservant announced Dr.

Gillespie. And as the corrosion of slavery is not easily eliminated from any human system, a pang of contrition and remorse shot through Archie Gilchrist's nature: here was his master; and he had been caught idling; it was as if Struthers had unexpectedly come in and found him dreaming of a line in Horace instead of attending to day-book and ledger. But this master was not as the other master; he betrayed no surprise on discovering his employé fleeting the time away in this pleasant company; nay, 'after salutations,' when he perceived the roll of MS. lying on the small garden-table, he hinted that a little bird had whispered to him of a certain collaboration, and he hoped that the two writers who had for so long been attacking each other in the columns of the Invernish *Observer* would find their advantage in working together in peace and amity.

"Oh, but understand, Doctor," said Miss Eelin, as she poured out some tea for him, "those two people are not known here. We don't recognise them. They can continue to squabble if they like—and doubtless they will. We don't even mention them. They are not of our set."

Now whatever Miss Eelin Macdonald said or did was right in the eyes of the bland, fresh-coloured, silver-haired Doctor, who was smiling so benignantly upon her over his gold spectacles; and he fell in with the mystification, and made no further reference to the newspaper combatants; but none the less he betrayed some little curiosity about the MS. before him. What had his assistant-sub-editor and his young friend the Daughter of the House of Kinvaig been about, when they laid their heads together?

"Well, I'll tell you all about it," said Eelin, with her usual bold frankness. "That is a small imaginative piece—a piece of fiction. The original idea was Mr. Gilchrist's; but as I have had something to do with the shaping of it, you will at once perceive that it must be a work of resplendent genius. You will admit that, of course. Very well. So far, good." The familiar, not to say the irreverent, way in which this slip of a girl treated so august a personage as the proprietor and editor of the Invernish *Observer* almost shocked Archie Gilchrist; but then he was not altogether used yet to Wild Eelin's ways; nor did he know that the goodnatured Doctor had considerably spoiled

her by much petting. "The worst of it is," the young lady continued, "that now we have completed this work of genius, we don't quite know what to do with it; and mamma wants a five-pound note for her Convalescent Home; and it has just occurred to me, my dear Doctor, that you might take the story for the *Observer*."

She was laughing at him—expecting confusion; but the shrewd and good-humoured Doctor was not easily put out. He affected to consider her proposal gravely.

"Yes? Well, now, five pounds is not a large sum—not a large sum—not at all: I think that is what was paid for another notable potboiler—"

"A potboiler!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"I am talking of the 'Ancient Mariner,'" he said, with an innocent air. "I think that is what Coleridge and Wordsworth got for the Rhyme, when they were away on some excursion or other, and found themselves hard up—"

"I thought that the Rhyme was Coleridge's and that the Excursion was Wordsworth's," she said; but he paid no heed to her ribaldry.

"However," he continued, "this is doubtless a much more important production—"

"I have told you it is!—"

"Yes. Quite so. And I am obliged to you for the offer. But hitherto we have not published any serial story in the *Observer*—"

"You should march with the times, Doctor!" she cried again. "Why, nowadays there is fiction everywhere!"

"That also is true," he replied to her, with much suavity. "There is fiction everywhere—but especially in the political rumours that come from Vienna. However, my main objection to using your story in the *Observer* is that I should be introducing a new feature that would have to be a permanent feature; and where could I find subsequent tales of equal merit? Impossible!—"

"Oh, now you are taking a harmless bit of fun seriously!" she said, pretending to be much hurt. "That's not like you, Doctor. That's rather mean. And if this little tale isn't a great work of genius, at least it's good enough for the readers of the Invernish *Observer!*"

"That I am sure of!" he answered her, impressively—though he was not in the least deceived by her offended

manner. "And as regards the five pounds for the Convalescent Home, well, my dear Miss Eelin, that might be come at without disturbing the old-fashioned traditions of a country newspaper."

He put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat-pocket; but at this point the gentle mother interposed, with more than her usual decision.

"No," said she, "I will not have my guests treated in this way. I will not have blackmail levied in my house. Don't pay any attention to her, Doctor: they must dispose of the manuscript as best they can."

Doctor Gillespie and Archie Gilchrist, when this visit was over, walked back into the town together; and the former was most friendly.

"When are you off for London?" said he.

"For London?"

"Yes. Every young man of literary ability and ambition has his eye fixed on London. To conquer London, or die —that's the watchword."

Alas! of late he had not been thinking of London at all. The visionary towers of Westminster Abbey had disappeared from the horizon. Rather he had been considering what was to be done with a broken and hopeless and useless life when the inevitable should happen, as it was bound to happen.

"It is a bold ambition," continued the good Doctor; "and too often it leads to long heartache and ends in failure; but for the one who succeeds the triumph is splendid. I suppose you'll try. There's something in your writing that tells me you'll try. There's a largeness of atmosphere—as if you were addressing a wider audience than Invernish: I think that sooner or later 'the terrible city' will draw you towards it. In that case I could give you some help, perhaps. We shall be sorry to lose you; but if it should come about—if 'the terrible city' should eventually get hold of you—then a few letters of introduction could do you no harm."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Archie Gilchrist. And it was all he could say. He was in utter perplexity—without plan or purpose; his mind a chaos; his future a matter of almost unconcern. It is true, in these later days he certainly appeared to have fallen among friends; but

none the less was he distraught and wretched and downcast; he began to understand better the incoherent messages left behind by this or that young man or young woman who had bade good-bye to the world and plunged into the unknown. Love-madness is sometimes said to be a mere invention of the poets. There were suicides from hopeless love and from disappointed love thousands of centuries before any poet was ever heard of.

Then there came an evening. He had been away out among the wilds and hills, perhaps seeking to find in their tranquil beauty and their silence some relief from the passionate unrest within his own bosom. Was it, then, to be London, and a wild dash for fame, and some one, not wholly uninterested, hearing of his renown? Or the Cape Mounted Rifles, and severance for ever, and forgetfulness? Or to go on and endure, letting an occasional moment of rapturous gratitude—for a look or a smile—compensate for long days and nights of despair? These were anxious and conflicting questions; and meanwhile the twilight had deepened to dusk; the trees along the river bank and on the wooded heights had grown dark; and dark also were the pathways and the hedges and walls; though the broad surface of the stream was still of a cold and steely hue, and in the west there was a waning silver-grey barred by heavy swathes of purple cloud. He heard voices borne far across the wide water: a trembling orange ray spoke here and there of a window being lit up. For now he was aimlessly returning home, with but little assuagement of his misery.

He did not notice, but gradually and stealthily the world around him was being transformed. Over the black foliage certain fleecy clouds had caught a suffusion of faint saffron radiance; the wide pastures had grown to be of a phantom grey; the mists were visible along the hills; if he had looked, he would have seen that he was now casting a shadow. And at length this new presence around him became so pronounced that he could not choose but have his attention drawn to it; he turned his head to ascertain; and behold! there was the full moon shining through a filmy haze, over the ebon masses of the woods. All the distant sounds were hushed now; the dominion of the night had begun—with the Empress of the night set high on her pale and mystic throne.

By this time he had arrived at the point where the garden surrounding Glengarva House abuts on the open fields; and he was just about to go through the little turnstile, to continue on his route into the town, when he perceived that someone was approaching from the other side. Well, it was none other than Miss Eelin Macdonald; for she was in the habit of stealing out from the grounds and passing along the river-front to this convenient corner, where she could the better inquire of the upland country about the weather prospects of the morrow. He hesitated—his heart sick with fear; then he advanced to the turnstile; and she, having satisfied herself as to the look of the night, was about to get back within doors again, when she recognised who the stranger was. So she halted, and shook hands with him, and asked him what he thought of the sky—Lily Neile and she having some scheme for the next day. And then, of course, as he was proceeding along the river-bank, and as she had to reach the gate of the carriage-drive before she could enter, they walked along together. It was a kind of inevitable thing.

The length of this promenade was simply the length of the front garden of Glengarva House—not over a hundred yards or so; and no doubt, in those few brief seconds, they talked the merest commonplaces. He did not know; and he did not care. Those honeyed words of hers could be recalled afterwards, and counted over, one by one, as a miser counts over his secret wealth. And in the meantime —that is to say, when they had parted at the gate, and when he had resumed his way into the town, between the glamorous grey of the river and the wan foliage and black shadows of the trees—in the meantime his brain was all afire with this new experience, and his exaltation was of a quite blind and delirious nature. For he had walked in the white moonlight with Eelin Macdonald; and to him it was as if, in the deeps of the forest, he had kissed Schön-Rohtraut's mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TIMEO DANAOS.

THERE arrived at Glengarva House a hamper of black game—with Lord Mountmahon's compliments.

There followed a sixteen-pound salmon—with Lord Mountmahon's compliments.

Next came a haunch of venison—with Lord Mountmahon's compliments.

And finally there appeared upon the scene Lord Mountmahon himself—gay, dauntless, self-assertive: a gorgeous kind of young man he seemed to be, with the resplendent button-hole in his Norfolk jacket of brown velvet: this was no shamefaced, timid, anxious-eyed student, humbly solicitous to please. The effulgent young man occupied the drawing-room, as it were. He dispensed his favours. And all his talk was of the forthcoming festivities.

"Never heard of such riot and revelry," said he, grinning in the most amiable fashion. "One's brain whirls. Let's see: what comes first? The Pony and Galloway races. I wish I had noticed an entry in your name, Miss Macdonald: wouldn't I have backed it? Yes, that I would! Well, there's plenty of other things for one to settle one's money on; and I imagine these wild merry-makings will cost some of us a pretty penny. The exhibition of Highland industries: I understand you have a stall there, Miss Eelin——"

Miss Eelin (hotly resentful at being addressed by her Christian name: an old fisherman, a washerwoman, a young servant-lass—these and their like were heartily welcome to use the familiarity; but not this efflorescent person) Miss Eelin replied, in a somewhat cold manner, that she merely meant to assist,

"But your name's in the papers!" he exclaimed—and his bold and semi-bemused eyes kept regarding her and examining her with evident satisfaction. "'Homespun cloths: Lady Helmsdale and Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig'—I saw it in the papers! I can tell you there will be some purchases made at that stall! I should think so! Yes. I stand by my friends. That's just what's the matter with me. I don't know Lady Helmsdale personally; but I know some of her people; Dick Baillie used to be a nailer at polo; well, I'll be at that stall; there'll be a purchaser at that stall; you mark my words; if all the people in Glengarva have to go squiring about in Harris tweeds—"

"It will be very good for the people in Glengarva," said Eelin—with rather proud lips; and then he interrupted her.

"Ah, but you know what I mean. It's your stall. I understand there's sometimes a little rivalry among you ladies; oh, yes; natural enough; and you like to see things going. Miss Eelin, your stall shall not be neglected. Don't you fear. You'll be kept busy with your little pencil and note-book—"

"I shall not be there!" said Eelin of the wave-blue eyes—and those eyes had a strange sort of wounded expression in them: perhaps she thought that her mother should have interfered to protect her. "I have given Lady Helmsdale all the help that she needs—"

"Eelin!" her mother protested. "You promised to take the stall until lunch-time!"

"Everything is ready," was the reply. "There is no necessity for me to be at the exhibition at all. Lady Helmsdale will have a shopgirl with her, to register the sales. There is no reason why I should go—"

"My goodness gracious!" Mountmahon cried. "There will be no attraction! Oh, really, now! What do you think I want with Harris tweeds? I was determined to make your stall the success of the show. And, of course I shall. Of course you must be there. It's your duty—to the cottars and crofters and all the rest of them. Of course you must go; and we'll make a shindy of it, if I have to buy the whole counter. You just put my name down. Put my name down for anything you like. And they let you have afternoon tea, I'm told. I'll be there. Lady Helmsdale's shopgirl can run the sales: we'll have tea, and

a look at the rank and fashion and beauty of Invernish. Then there's the Games—the kilted warriors of the north—bag-pipes—tartans—strathspeys: of course you are going, Mrs. Macdonald?"

For a moment he turned to the mamma, who answered him—

"Oh, no. But Lady Helmsdale has been kind enough to offer to take Eelin with her——"

"Ah, Lady Helmsdale?" he said, thoughtfully. "It is clear I must make Lady Helmsdale's acquaintance. I must be of that party—if you will allow me, Miss Eelin—"

"Oh, but I'm not going," the girl answered, hurriedly. "I—I have seen the Highland Games often before—"

"But not as they are to be this year!" he insisted. "Oh, really, you must go! You see, besides the usual things, there are those gymnastic fellows from Aldershot—sword exercise—lance exercise—quarter-staff—vaulting horse—all kinds of things: rather dainty it will be, if there's anything like decent weather. And I'll be of your party; yes, I will; I've only to tell Lady Helmsdale that I used to know her cousin, Dick Baillie, before he got broke to bits and bolted—an awful fool, to make a hash of himself about a married woman. Well, now, isn't there something about members' tickets—separate entrance—for I must know where to find you—"

There flashed upon the mind of the girl a dreadful picture: the great enclosure—the terraced benches—the concourse of people—all her friends from far and near assembled—and these not failing to observe that Eelin Macdonald was submitting herself to the insolent attentions of this too notorious peer. And yet her mother did not interpose a word.

"Oh, there will be no difficulty," continued the confident young man—and he resumed his enchanted scrutiny of her features. "What I want I get. It's a way I have; and it's the only way worth having. You only live once. *Persistare* is my motto. *Persistare?*—no, it doesn't sound quite right; but what I mean is keep on and keep on till you get what you're after. You'll see how I'll chum in with Lady Helmsdale at the Highland Industries. I'll buy the whole stall—dashed if I don't. Women are awfully proud of that sort of thing: biggest sale on record: all

cleared out. And I will be of your party at the Games—I mean, if you will honour me with your permission, Miss Eelin; of course, I mean that. I'll square it with Lady Helmsdale—don't you fear. I've got a way, you know. I don't like to boast, but I generally get what I want. In reason, of course. I don't cry for the moon. But *Persistare* is a good motto."

At this point his lordship was offered tea, which he declined; but when he jocularly remarked that a little brandy and soda was more in the nature of the medicine he was accustomed to take, that refreshment was provided for him; and he joyfully resumed:

"And now about the two ball-evenings: that's the great feature, of course; all the house-parties in from the shooting-lodges; swellest affair in the North of Scotland, they tell me. Of course, you'll be taking your daughter, Mrs. Macdonald? No? Oh, still under the wing of Lady Helmsdale? Then I perceive it is more than ever imperative that I should get at once into Lady Helmsdale's good graces. Yes, yes; I can manage it. Sometimes people don't cotton to me at first; I am aware of that; I admit that; but very soon they find I am not such a bad sort. I am not one of the clever Johnnies; and I don't pretend to be; but there are worse sons of Adam wandering about this planet than I am. I'll put the blarney over Lady Helmsdale. I'll woolly-lamb her till she won't know where she is. And I hope, Miss Eelin, you'll be good to me. You see, I don't know many of the fair goddesses of these parts. I shall have to rely on you. I'll come early, while your programme is as yet a virgin page; and you'll give me as many dances as you can with decent propriety. I'm not greedy. I would rather sit out—if there's any convenient place for strolling up and down; or perhaps a corner in the refreshment-room."

"But, Lord Mountmahon, are you really going to the balls?" asked the gentle lady of the house. In truth she was shocked. How many weeks was it since this young man had been following the coffin of his drowned wife?

"Why, they tell me these two dances are the great event of the Gathering!" he cried. "And I've never been before. Always too busy—yes, crawling through wet heather after measly stags, and missing them all over the place. Now I

want a little enjoyment. I like a bit o' fun; but crawling on all fours for miles at a stretch isn't fun at all. Not much. A precious sight worse than the tread-mill. And all the whisky in the world won't keep the wet out: wonder it isn't a bee-line for Kensal Green. But this is different now—very different: youth and beauty, and a quiet chat in a corner: oh, you'll see if I don't woolly-lamb old mother Helmsdale—I beg your pardon, I do really—I didn't mean to be disrespectful—I don't know the lady—she may be as fair and young and fresh as a rose in June: anyhow, you may take it I shall be friends with her before this ancient universe is many hours older. Because I have a way, you know. Yes, I have. I hold on, till I get what I want."

There could be no doubt whatever as to what all this portended; and the moment the ebullient young man had gone, Eelin turned in a half-frightened, half-piteous kind of way to her mother.

"Mother, I'm not going to the balls!—I would rather stay at home with you. And as for the Games, I've seen plenty of Highland Games before. And the Industries—Lady Helmsdale can get some one else to look after the stall: it is rather insulting when any stranger has the right to come up and speak to you—before all the people. Mother, what does he want!" she went on—and the dark blue eyes were very near to tears. "Why does he come here—and send all things—and wish for our acquaintance? I shouldn't have thought he was the kind of person you would favour. Mother, I hate him!—I loathe the sight of him. If he comes here again, I'll shut myself up in my room. I won't see him. He cannot make me see him—if I am in my own room. And I won't sit out any dances with him!—I won't go to the balls!—"

Now the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn had never thought of formulating for herself any philosophy of life; but in her anxious forecasts about her daughter's happiness, she had ceaselessly inculcated the wisdom of tolerance—the wisdom of taking people and things as they are, not expecting too much, in short making the best of the only world which, for the present, we have the opportunity of using. And at this crisis, conscious of Eelin's vague alarm and distress, she began to defend the young man.

How could any one say that the stories told of him were true? How could she know that there were prize-fighters at Bridge of Kinvaig? There might have been at one time or another; and local gossip was a wild-running thing. Surely she must at least credit Lord Mountmahon with generous intentions? Not every one was gifted with a fastidious taste. And so forth. Perhaps she was a little too earnest. Or it may have been that the girl, high-mettled as to physical courage as she always was, at the moment was unstrung nervously, and a prey to dim forebodings. She listened, almost without protest. But none the less a black terror, indefinable, held possession of her soul; she knew not what was before her, but she was overcome by an instinctive dread; and she began to have secret thoughts. She would not argue. She wanted to get out of the house—to be away by herself. And in time she did find herself free and in the open-air: her eyes receiving no impression whatever from the wide stream, and the hanging woods, and the moving and changing sky.

She walked quickly into the town, and called at the Caledonian Hotel, and asked if Mr. Allan Macdonald were within. She found him seated in the verandah at the back of the house, overlooking the garden and the river; and out there among the brilliant flower-plots a young lad was marching up and down with the pipes over his shoulder, while he valiantly played *I got a kiss of the King's hand.* But the moment he caught sight of the visitor, he changed his tune. His braggart stride became a slow and stately step; and the wail of the pipes was the *Lament of Macdonald of Kinvaig.* And it showed how unwrought and distracted the girl was that again the tears should have welled into her eyes. How many hundreds and thousands of times had she not heard the Kinvaig Lament!—and in the present instance it was only a sort of compliment and recognition. And indeed there was no faltering in her voice when she went forward to greet the tall old blind man who was seated in a garden-chair; and of course he could not see that she was crying.

"I am glad to find you at home, Mr. Macdonald," said she, right cheerfully—when he had held up his hand as a signal that the piping should cease—"because I want to beg for your advice. It's about a girl I know. I'm afraid

you'll think her an awful idiot. She's a young girl—about twenty, I should say. And nobody has ever asked her in marriage. That's the joke of it. Nobody has asked her; and yet she's frightened; for she thinks she has responsibilities; and she thinks that somebody is going to ask her; and she has responsibilities. Perhaps I can't explain very well; but it's something like this. Suppose you imagine a young girl that has had twenty years of the most constant care and affection—day and night—constant love and devotion and thoughtfulness: well, don't you think she owes something in return, even if it took the form of a kind of sacrifice of her own feelings? And suppose that her mother is the last representative of an old race; that she has valuable family relics, for example, that she might wish to see carried over to some famous historical house; and—and—if the mother expects the girl to make what is called a good match; and if the mother is so good and gentle and unselfish that she will hardly suggest it; but the girl knows what her mother is thinking; and the girl feels herself bound in honour to do something in repayment for twenty years of such extraordinary affection: surely she would sacrifice something of her own feelings—supposing—supposing that it was a marriage she had no liking for? Well, Mr. Macdonald, after all, you must consider that girl I have been telling you about a most silly idiot; for, you see, she hasn't been asked; and it may be mere vanity on her part—mere absurd and ridiculous vanity; and I am not wishing you to sympathise with her in the least bit. At the same time there are appearances—perhaps she is over-alarmed—but there are appearances; and what she is thinking of mostly is what her mother may expect of her—"

If the blind man could not see, he could hear; and there was a sound of sobbing; for this Wild Eelin who used to have such splendid courage had utterly broken down.

"God bless me!" he exclaimed, in consternation. "What has happened? What is happening?"

But she had a fine spirit. She pulled herself together. Her handkerchief was not long at her eyes.

"Well, I only wanted to ask if you ever heard of such a ridiculous idiot of a girl!" she said—and she affected to laugh. "A girl who hasn't been asked in marriage, and yet is frightened she will be—and goes and worries her

friends about such a vague possibility. I am sorry I troubled you about her, Mr. Macdonald. Girls take such fancies. And won't you tell that young lad to begin playing again. The *Seventy-ninth's Farewell* is the best of all of them. The *Farewell to Gibraltar* is the best of them all."

The blind man sate silent for a considerable time. Then he said :

"Miss Eelin, I hope you will not consider me impertinent. But I will venture to ask you a question ; and you are free to leave it unanswered. Yes, it sounds impertinent ; but I would like to ask you if you have had any visitor of late at Glengarva House—I mean, any newcomer."

She had wholly pulled herself together by this time.

"Oh, yes," she answered him, blithely enough. "Lord Mountmahon has honoured us by calling once or twice. He is the shooting tenant, you know, at Kinvaig—and I dare say the stories they repeat about his having music-hall people there, and prizefighters, are exaggerated or inventions altogether. But we're not going to talk about him. No, no. I want you to tell me who this young lad is. He will make his mark. He has got the real thrill and tremble of the fingers. Mr. Macdonald, bid him play the *Seventy-ninth's Farewell*."

"Ay," said the old man, slowly, "but if my son Somerled was here, that is not what young Andrew would be asked to play."

"No ? What, then ? "

"He would say to him : 'Andrew, you are playing before Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig. Play *The Glen's Mine!*'"

CHAPTER XIX.

A SITUATION OF PERIL.

INDEED she was of a high-mettled kind. She squeezed the last tears out of the sea-blue eyes; she held her head erect; and as, in going into the street, she chanced to encounter a friend of hers, she hailed him with a fine air of good-fellowship. He was a drover—a short, thick, red-bearded man—and he had in front of him a lot of terrified sheep, three yelping collies, and two anxious young lads apprehensive of vehicles in this narrow thoroughfare.

"How are you, John?" she called to him. "I hope you are well."

"Oh, yes, thank you: and I hope Miss Macdonald herself is ferry well."

"I thought my name was Eelin—to my friends," she answered him. "But never mind. That's a fine stick you have, John."

"It's a good stick, this one," said he—but always with a concerned glance towards the huddling and crowding sheep.

"I think I could find you some employment for it," said she.

"Ay?—and would Miss Macdonald say what was her pleasure?" he made answer to her—but all the same he was watching two farm-carts that were coming right down through the drove.

"Well, I should have imagined," she retorted, proudly, "that after all the years that you and I have known each other it would not be 'Miss Macdonald' and 'Miss Macdonald'! And I am sorry to have interrupted you. Good-day to you, Iain Ruadh!"

"Miss Eelin—my young lady—you're not going away like that!" said the distracted man—and therewith he called

in Gaelic to the two lads, and he shouted to the excited collies, and there was a vast amount of gesticulation, and whistling, and frantic reproach, at the end of which, and in an amazingly short space of time, the nebulous multitude of sheep had been withdrawn from the narrow thoroughfare, and had been collected together, in a compact, circular, and quiescent mass, on the open ground that lies between the Invernish *Observer* office and the river-side. Wild Eelin laughed in approval.

"I never saw you do better, John!——no, not on any hillside in all Glen Shira!"

"And what will Miss Eelin be wishing with me?" said the drover with the red-brown eyes and the shaggy eyebrows.

"I want to tell you a story, John. It's about a number of children—small boys mostly; and it's about a scoundrel who sells fruit and sweeties in this town; and he got a consignment of plums that he knew to be rotten—every one of them filled with maggots; and yet he tempted the children by putting out a placard of a penny a pound; and you can guess what crying there was among the small people when they discovered they had been cheated."

"He was a mean man, that one," observed the drover, reflectively.

"And is that all you have to say about it?" she challenged him. "For, don't you see, the law can't punish him: at least I suppose it can't: there's no evidence—all the rotten fruit has been thrown away. And yet I think he ought to be punished—law or no law—"

There began to dawn on the mind of Red John some idea of what this was that Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig demanded of him.

"Aw, Cosh, Miss Eelin, would you like me to give him a weltin?" he exclaimed.

"That's a thick stick of yours, John," she observed, regarding it.

The red-brown eyes began to burn a little.

"Where uz that man? Will ye tek me to him? The sheep can bide here ferry well. And if Miss Eelin is of opeenion that he deserves a weltin—well, we'll see what can be done about that: we can try, whateffer."

So the proud-stepping Daughter of a Thousand Thanes and her friend the thick-set drover went away up the

passage by the side of the *Observer* office, and crossed over Church-street, and followed down another lane, of a slummy character; and not a word did either of them utter, for Red John was clearly nursing his wrath. Then they came to a dingy little shop in the window of which were displayed shabby fruit and cheap confections; and they found behind the counter an unshaven, pallid-faced person, who looked rather frightened when he saw them enter. He had reason for his alarm.

"Was you the man," said John, with his red-brown eyes burning deep, "that was selling the rotten fruit to the weans?"

The man glanced at the drover's stick, and knew what was coming; and instantly he made a dash for the small back-parlour. He did get inside the door: but he had no time to turn the lock, for the burly drover was agile enough; and the next moment both men had disappeared. At first there was only a scuffling and scrimmage; but presently came thud!—and thud!—and thud!—and wild protestations and desperate menaces—and again thud!—and thud!—and thud!—until Eelin grew frightened. Was a murder being perpetrated in there?

The door was opened, and the unshaven wretch was dragged out by the scruff of the neck.

"You will apolochise to my young lady!" said John.

"No, no," said Eelin, interfering with that air of quiet authority she could assume on occasion. "Let me speak to him." She turned to the craven hound at the end of the counter. "You richly deserve what you got," said she, "but if you wish to take proceedings I will bear the brunt of them. I alone am responsible. My name is Eelin Macdonald; and I live at Glengarva House—just outside the town—"

"By Kott, there will be no proceedings!" said John, vehemently, with his red eyes glowering at the fear-stricken fruiterer. "If there's any proceedings, then I will come back and give him another weltin—and mebbe a better weltin than that one—"

"At least," said the man, panting and shaking, and yet anxious not to lose an opportunity, "at least—there will be—compensation—"

"Yes," Miss Eelin replied, promptly, "there will be compensation—for those children whose money you stole: as

far as I can find them out each one shall have back his or her penny. But as for you, you will get no compensation—from me. Good-day!"

So she and Red John left the shop, and returned along the lane, and then they parted—he hurrying off to his sheep, and she going on her way triumphant, for justice had been done in one small corner of the earth, and certain tiny friends of hers had been well avenged. She walked quickly, having much to do. First she called at the Highland Home Industries, to see if there were any more parcels for Lady Helmsdale's stall that might want pricing and ticketing. Then she looked in on Mr. Edel, and told him that an elderly gentleman, an acquaintance of hers, was staying at the Caledonian Hotel, who was much interested with everything connected with the Clan Donald; and if he, Mr. Edel, came across any old pamphlets relating thereto, he was in nowise to part with them until she had inspected them, for she might wish to make a present of them. Then she went into one shop after another, to order things for the house. Next she visited Mrs. Fordyce the grocer, and purchased considerable stores of tea and sugar (for she was rich now: no longer had she to wear the beggar's badge of Huntly Parish: Somerled Macdonald had emancipated her from that extreme need); and these she herself carried along to old Granny Sinclair, as an excuse for setting the room to rights and getting some fresh air in by an opened window. These varied and busy employments may for the moment have banished certain fancies from her brain; at all events old Mother Sinclair declared she had never seen Miss Eelin look so well and bonny, and never seen her in such high spirits either, so gay and wayward and domineering was she. And again, when she set off for home—through the golden evening, with the tall elms shivering down silver-grey shadows on the smooth current of the river—she was making a brave show of herself, to herself. She walked with a buoyant air and a swinging stride. She persuaded herself that there was nothing else ringing through her empty head but the blithe lines

> 'O say, will you marry me, Nelly Munro?
> O say, will you marry me, Nelly Munro?
> For guidsake, for ony sake, dinna say no,
> Or else ye may bury me, Nelly Munro!'

She watched a black cat—about as black as her own Beelzebub—creeping stealthily after a robin; and she flung a stone at it; strange to say (but she had acquired some boyish accomplishments) the stone did fall near enough the animal to interrupt its stalk. She found two small urchins sending a dog into the river; and she stopped to remonstrate with them; she pointed out that this was a salmon stream, and that to have a spaniel splashing about in the pools was not the best way of encouraging the fish to remain there; then, observing that her monitions had considerably depressed the two culprits, she gave them each a penny, and told them to go away into the town and buy sweets.

"But what sweets will you buy?" said she, with due regard to their welfare.

The one shock-headed brat looked at the other, and at length mustered up courage to say—

"Droaps."

"Ay, but what kind of droaps?" she demanded again.

"Acid droaps."

"That'll do," she said. "That'll do. Off you go; and leave the pools alone."

Then she came upon old Fergus, who was out in the water, and throwing a beautiful line with the Spey cast.

"That's a fine line, Fergus!" she called to him.

"No better than you can do yourself, Miss Eelin," he answered her.

"Oh, get away with you! But I don't see you catching any fish!"

"There's no luck."

"There's no salmon!"

"Ay, maybe that's the way of it," said Fergus; and again the long line came in with a slow side sweep, then there was a quiver of the top of the rod and a forward and upward stroke, and again the almost invisible thread flew away out, while only a practised eye could have told where the fly touched the water. She watched him for a minute or two, but nothing rose; so she resumed her route; and this one or that who knew her, and chanced to meet her—exchanging a smile and a passing word—they also thought they had never seen Miss Eelin look so handsome, and merry, and high-spirited. She seemed to go 'singing on

her way'—with all the audacious carelessness and happy vitality of youth.

But now a singular thing occurred. When she entered by the gate, and went a little way up the carriage-drive, she could see through the thick belt of laurel and holly that her mother was seated on a bench fronting the tennis-lawn, engaged in some kind of work; and for the first time in her life she paused and hesitated before going round to report herself; nay, after a brief second of shame and self-reproach, and with burning face and bowed head, she guiltily stole by unobserved and got into the house and sought the safety of her own room. What, then, was this that had come between mother and daughter—leaving the latter a prey to hidden thoughts? Why should she not have gone straight to the bench beside the tennis-lawn, and said frankly, 'Mother, what do you mean by so earnestly defending that young man? What do you mean by it? What is it you expect of me? What are your own wishes and hopes?' But well she knew that that would have been of little avail. For whatever dim desires and projects might have been in the mind of the Bean-an-Tighearn, as the last representative of an ancient family, not one word would she utter that might in any way compromise her daughter's happiness. Eelin knew that well enough. Her mother would not speak. It was for her to guess—though this attack of nervous foreboding had not left her judgment very clear.

For indeed all that fine bravado with which she had sought to impose on herself as she walked home was a thing of naught. All the time, deep down in her mind, she was haunted by certain ominous sentences. 'I generally get what I want': the phrase by itself is meaningless enough: not so the glance by which it was accompanied. '*Persistare* is my motto': another idle phrase—but the significance of it, as he uttered it, was unmistakeable. And then her mother had deserted her; or rather had she not ranged herself on the other side, though her desires and expectations were as yet dumb? And what was demanded of the girl-descendant of the *Rex Insularum?* At the present moment she could define nothing accurately; she only knew that she was possessed by a vague, instinctive dread, and that the future seemed full of looming terrors.

And then she said to herself "Oh, this will never do! This will never do at all!" and she deliberately went to her writing table, and sate down, and opened her portfolio, and after a minute or two of thinking proceeded to continue a little paper she had begun for the Invernish *Observer*. It was entitled *Two Mites in a Cheese;* and it took the form of a dialogue between these personages, who with great difficulty had climbed to the summit of an eminence almost as big as a pin's head. One of them, it appeared, had invented a most ingenious instrument, called the phantasmoscope, which was capable of determining the composition of the various substances in the world around him, each of these substances, when volatilized, having its phantasm or arrangement of lines of various breadth; and this mite the first went on to argue that when he applied his marvellous instrument to other worlds, and obtained identical scrolls, it was a fair assumption that the same substances, in equivalent conditions, existed there as well. Unfortunately mite the second appeared to be of a somewhat sceptical turn. He demurred to the assumption. Then mite the first grew warm. He said that any mite that was a mite must perceive the clearness of the reasoning. Mite the second said there was no reasoning; that the phantasmoscope proved nothing; that to assume that the conditions were similar in the other worlds, and to assume that these thick and thin lines meant the same thing in all circumstances, was an outrageous begging of the question. At this point (for their language was growing emphatic) Wild Eelin began to giggle; and all her troubles were for the moment forgotten. It was the scientific mite who had most completely lost his temper; and finally, when the discussion was like to have culminated in blows, he declared that he would contend no longer; that it was useless; that the mite had not the brain of a mite, but the brain of a misbegotten jackass, who could not perceive this great truth; and that he, mite the first, had triumphantly proved, had proved to demonstration, that the whole of the created universe consisted of but one element, and that that element was——. 'What, then?' snarled mite the second. 'Why Stilton, of course—you mitunculus!' And so the paper ended. It was a harmless bit of banter: not even the most sensitive among the scientifics—if any such were likely to

come across a copy of the Invernish *Observer*—could have been wounded by it.

She folded up the MS., and put it into an envelope, and addressed it to Mr. Grieve ; and then she began hurriedly to dress for dinner, which was early this evening, because she and her mother were thereafter going to the theatre. And she understood that Archie Gilchrist was to be present ; and she had made up her mind that, if they chanced to meet, she would be most kind and gracious towards him ; for he, at least, was modest, and intelligent, and respectful—not bold-eyed and insolent. Curiously enough, and almost unknown to herself, she was absently wondering whether, under that shy apprehensiveness of his, there was a sufficiency of strong and manly character : she seemed to have an indefinable and anxious craving for alliance and shelter and protection—now that her mother appeared to her to have become in some strange way silent and reticent and apart.

CHAPTER XX.

AT THE PLAY.

It was at this time that Madame Grace Pinkerton, the celebrated provincial actress, brought her company to Invernish; by some means or other Madame had obtained an introduction to Mr. Tom Grieve; the sub-editor, having heard something of the pitiful life-story of this poor woman, hinted to his assistant—who had been promoted to the post of dramatic critic—that if he could say a friendly word about her in the *Observer* no harm would be done; and Archie Gilchrist not only undertook to do so, but went about mentioning the forthcoming series of performances, and enlisting sympathy and support; so it came about that the two ladies of Glengarva House had promised to be present on the opening night, though theatre-going was not much in their way. And whom but Archie Gilchrist himself did they first set eyes on, as they entered the large and gaunt building? He was in the front row of the stalls, next to the orchestra. Of course he was looking out for them; and his heart seemed almost to suffocate him when at last he saw Wild Eelin at the portal; and his face was in a flame and his brain in a mad bewilderment when he rose and bowed to them, in response to their smiling salutation. And then he sate down again. He had not the courage to go round and speak to them, when they had taken their places. Or perhaps it was some kind of false pride that deterred him? If Mrs. and Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig honoured him by a certain measure of friendship in private, he was not going to parade the fact before this public assemblage. All the same his eyes were in the back of his head. It was little attention he paid to the ragged representation of the Bay of Naples that did duty for a drop-scene. He knew only that those two were behind him; he

wondered whether Miss Eelin was scanning this one or the other whom he also could see ; he was terribly anxious that the melodrama might not prove too preposterous ; and he was stirred to fury by the tramping of the lads in the back benches, who were thus manifesting their impatience. Had they no manners, the brutes ? He could have shaken them by the back of the neck, as a terrier shakes a rat. For it was at his suggestion that the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn and the beautiful and proud and haughty Eelin Macdonald had come to this unwonted place—to be insulted by these vociferous calls, and whistlings, and the stamping of feet. O that the play would begin—and prove to be even passable !

And at length the ragged curtain was raised, and the opening scenes of *Lady Annesley's Crime* were proceeded with. The melodrama turned out to be neither better nor worse than most of its kind—conventional characters, forced situations, dialogue such as was never spoken anywhere by human beings ; but amid all this rant and fustian there was one redeeming feature, and that was the earnestness of Madame herself, who played the leading part. She believed in herself ; she thought she was impressing her audience ; she was trying hard to infuse life and naturalness into all this wooden and mechanical stuff. Well, the critic of the Invernish *Observer* knew nothing of the art of acting ; he had had no experience ; but at least he could recognise the sincerity of this poor woman's endeavours ; and he was resolved that the friendly word that had been begged of him should be more than friendly, if he knew anything of the English language.

Alas ! while his vision was thus concentrated on the unreal and impossible world before him, the eyes in the back of his head did not tell him what was happening in the actual world just behind him. In the middle of one of the acts, the potboy-looking Lord Mountmahon had lolled into the hall, had cast a glance around, had discovered where Mrs. Macdonald and her daughter were seated, had gone forward to them with his most captivating grin and shaken hands with them, and then had coolly taken his place by the side of the elder lady.

"Heard you were to be here," he said, in his offhand, jolly, confident way. "Madame Pinkerton herself told me. Used to be a pal o' mine, before she went and made that

hash of a marriage. Awful stupid to have no boxes in a theatre; she'd have sent you one—distinguished patronage, don't you know. I say," he continued, lowering his voice a little, so that Miss Eelin should not hear, "I'll tell you why I came to-night——"

"I suppose to see the play," observed Eelin's mother, with some little asperity: she did not like being talked to during a performance.

"Oh, that?" he said, with a momentary and contemptuous glance towards the stage. "That's all tommy-rot. Awfully good of you to come here, you and Miss Eelin; but you needn't martyrise yourselves by taking that bosh seriously. I suppose the leading lady does; she's rather a stupid woman. Besides, she has to earn her living. I bought a dozen stalls, and gave them away; I fancy she's in rather low water at present; she made a desperate hash of her marriage. But what I wanted to say was this—are you much of a stickler for form, Mrs. Macdonald? Oh, it's quite right and proper; let's have everything proper and correct; and you'll find me doing everything fair, square, and aboveboard. They may have told you stories about me; but I'm not such a bad sort. And I want to see you privately, in your own house, for a few minutes. When would it be convenient, now? I like to forge ahead, you know. You only live once; and you mustn't let the other Johnnies get the best of you. Well, now, about to-morrow, my dear lady. What do you say about to-morrow? You couldn't give a fellow a snack of luncheon at one, could you? Immensely cheeky of me to ask you; it's what they call effrontery in books; but I like to forge ahead, and get matters settled. Especially important matters—oh, yes—an important event; and I want you to be on my side. You see, I have to go down to Glengarva by the afternoon steamer—three o'clock; but if you could give me a snack of luncheon at one, then we might have our little private talk—"

"We shall be most pleased if you will lunch with us to-morrow, Lord Mountmahon," said Eelin's mother (but with such a whirl of hurried conjectures and imaginings as it is impossible to describe). "And one o'clock will suit us admirably."

"Ah, that's all right, then," he said, with distinct

approval. "That's quite correct. First step secured, and the sooner we get on further the better. Don't you believe what they say about me, Mrs. Macdonald. People talk. The idiots can't help it. Their tongues will go. And if they found their tongues wouldn't go they'd drop down dead through sheer fright. And you understand what a fuss is made in small provincial quarters—people who don't know the world—who have never been anywhere—never seen anything—except their own back garden and a hymn-book. But you are not like that. You have lived in the great world. You know what life is: rather a mixed affair; yes, rather a mixed affair; but not so bad on the whole, when you make allowances. And if there's anybody that doesn't need allowances made for them, well, I've never met them. They're the saints, I suppose. But if you could learn a little more about the private conduct of the saints, you wouldn't be so cast down in suffering and woe. One human being is most uncommon like another human being—that's what I say. And the saints are just like other people, only they add on a layer of hypocrisy. Now that's shabby. That's mean. But it's only the jugginses that are taken in, and imagine the saints and saintesses to be what they profess to be. Of course it's all bally rot—that's what I maintain. Human nature is human nature. I dare say I could be a saint myself—if I laid on the hypocrisy thick enough. Well, it's not my way. I want to be fair, square, and aboveboard; and they may talk about me until they burst; they won't find me answering them. But when it comes to a delicate question—as this is—then I hope allowances will be made: and not too much attention paid to the chatter of ill-conditioned gillies and dismissed housemaids—oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Macdonald!—I never imagined that you could hear anything of that kind—of course not!—but there has been talk. And I don't deny that I like a bit o' fun," he went on, in his airy and easy and complacent fashion. "I don't deny it. Youth will have its fling, you know—perfectly natural—perfectly right and natural; and I like a bit o' skylarking. I'm not denying it; but then, don't you see, if one had a better example before one, one might reform a little. In reason, you understand. Oh, yes, in reason. You don't become a reformed character right off the reel. That's not to be expected. But in

reason. Oh, I tell you, I should rather like to try a little bit of reform. I'd go in for it. Yes, I would. Especially when there were other attractions that would repay one. But we'll talk about that to-morrow. One o'clock; and sharp to the minute is my motto."

Now Eelin Macdonald had not overheard, nor had she wished to overhear, this onesided conversation; but none the less was she indignant that Lord Mountmahon should have before all these people seated himself by her mother's side and should so openly have neglected the play in order to monopolise her attention; and the more ostentatiously, therefore, did she devote herself to the stage, to follow what was going forward there. And if her sympathies were entirely with this poor heroine who was striving so pathetically to make her tragic story seem real, they were soon to be called into still more active operation. For all the way through the performance there had been perceptible among a rabble of youths at the back of the hall a disposition to turn the piece into ridicule; and at the end of the fourth act, where the heroine mourns over the deathbed of her son, this tendency broke loose into a tumult of loud laughter. It was altogether a disgraceful scene; and Eelin's fierce wrath and scorn were in nowise lessened when she found that the potboy sitting next her mother was also sniggering. The catcalls continued—the loud jeering and vacant laughter—the whistling to emphasise the derision of the pit; and at last the act-drop was prematurely rung down.

And then, a moment or two afterwards, there appeared before the curtain a solitary woman—a tall and handsome woman with raven-black hair. Her stage make-up did not conceal the fact that she was now intensely pale; she was trembling from head to foot; tears were rolling down her cheeks—perhaps she had been unnerved by her passionate efforts in the deathbed scene even before she had to meet this emergency. And this was what she said, in a broken voice, addressing the turbulent part of the audience:

"I am not angry with you. Pray believe me, I am not vexed with you. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps the play is not quite what you expected. I will not produce it again. But—but there is another act—but there is another act; and—and I would beg of you for a little consideration. I ask you for a little consideration. As a woman—and very

much alone—I appeal to you. We are all of us in this play doing our best to merit your approval; but it is not easy—it is not easy to—it is not easy——" And here the piteous sentences failed her; for a violent fit of sobbing had overtaken her: and with shaken frame, and with bowed head, and with her hands clasped over her face, the poor woman staggered away from before the gaze of this half-amused, half-ashamed crowd.

Wild Eelin's lips were white; and her eyes were brimming over; and her breath caught more than once as she took out her pencil and began to scribble hurriedly on the envelope that had contained the stall tickets. This was what she scrawled—with the word lash doubly underlined: *If you are writing about the performance to-night, I hope you will lash these cowards.—E. M.* And then she folded up the envelope, and got hold of an attendant, and had it conveyed to the gentleman who was seated at the end of the front row of the stalls. Archie Gilchrist rose, and turned round, and bowed in acquiescence to this demand. He could not, at that distance, perceive that the "eyes with the blue of the sea-wave" in them were all wet and shining; and, as it chanced, he did not notice that the notorious Mountmahon was engaged in conversation with Eelin's mother. The large hall was not very well lighted.

This episode occurred at the end of the fourth act; and of the fifth act Gilchrist, professional critic as he was, did not see very much, for his brain was simply at fever heat devising malignant phrases and epithets that would burn and stab and rankle. For he had been angry enough even before the beginning of the piece at the unruly behaviour of those louts in the pit; but now his indignation was beyond all bounds; moreover had he not just received a command from Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig? The moment the melodrama had concluded, he hastened round to the *Observer* office, and at once plunged headlong into his diatribe. The beginning was cunningly calm and mild. "The ill-manners of the low-class youth of Invernish have long been notorious. In no other town or city of Europe" (Archie Gilchrist had never crossed the Channel; but phrases of this kind are part of a critic's equipment; they give him an air of importance and experience and authority) "could the spectacle be found of idle loafers lounging at

the corners of the principal thoroughfares, occupying the whole breadth of the pavement, polluting the air with their vile tobacco and viler language, and not budging one inch when any lady approaches, on the contrary driving her out into the mud of the causeway." [He had seen the Bean-an-Tighearn so treated on one occasion, and he had resolved he would have it out with the boors sooner or later.] "But when these unlicked cubs come into a theatre to vaunt their ribald buffoonery, to make themselves an intolerable nuisance to the rest of the audience, to shamelessly insult the performers—and one of these performers an educated and accomplished woman, whose very existence depends on her winning and retaining the favour of the public—then surely it becomes the duty of the respectable members of the community to enter some kind of protest." And so he went on, the lashing becoming every moment more and more savage, until he had to leave off in order to deal with the performance, and in that direction his language was just as kind and generous as hitherto it had been vicious and vindictive. Then away with the 'copy' to the composing-room (for there was generally a driving rush on Friday night), with a prayer for a speedy proof: he could not have his vengeance postponed for a whole week.

It was Tom Grieve who brought the rough proof into his assistant's den.

"Here, Gilchrist," said he, "what the devil have you been about! Why, man, there'll be a riot in the town! They'll burn down the whole building! I really can't let this go in."

"If you don't," said Archie Gilchrist, serenely, "I'm out and off from this office to-morrow—for good."

"Oh, don't be a fool!"

"I mean it."

"Wonder what the Doctor'll say," observed the sub-editor, looking ruefully at the damp ribbon of paper.

"The Doctor will say it was well deserved," said Gilchrist, "when he comes to hear Miss Macdonald's account of the affair."

"Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig?" said the sub-editor, regarding the younger man curiously.

"Yes."

"Oh, she was there, was she? And perhaps she inspired this hot-blast of fury?"

Gilchrist would not answer.

"I suspect that's it. She's given to impetuosities. I rather imagine she put you on to this. Well, I suppose I must chance it: she's a particular pet of the Doctor's."

And thus it was that early on the next morning, Miss Eelin, who had been up and out and strolling along the river-bank, in her eager expectation of the messenger-boy, got hold of the Invernish *Observer;* and with her heart exulting she read the fierce denunciation of those brutal and illiterate louts; and she fled swiftly up to her mother's room, waving the newspaper above her head.

"Oh, Mummie, it's splendid!" she cried. "You never read anything so splendid! I knew he would give them what for! And I must ask him out to luncheon this very day—to thank him."

Her mother turned round from the dressing-table at which she was sitting.

"Eelin, do you forget? I told you last night Lord Mountmahon was coming to luncheon to-day."

"And well?" said the girl, with an instant change of manner. "At least Mr. Gilchrist will not have a retinue of music-hall singers and pugilists hanging about the gate and waiting for him."

"Eelin, you distress me!" the mother said, in a pleading kind of way. "What can you expect your life to be if you take such violent prejudices—if you will not make allowances for people—if you will not give them credit for trying to amend their ways? I wish you could have heard what Lord Mountmahon had to say about himself last night. If only you could be a little more charitable!"

"Then I am not to ask Mr. Gilchrist to come to luncheon?" Eelin said, rather proudly.

"Yes, you will ask him—as I see you wish it," her mother answered her.

And then the girl—but somewhat slowly and thoughtfully—went away to her own room, to write out the note of invitation. It was a strange kind of thing, but she seemed to be summoning to her an ally.

CHAPTER XXI.

'CAM' SEEKING ME TO WOO, O!'

THERE was an ominous gloom preceding this luncheon. The leaden morning had turned to rain—a solid, heavy, steady downpour; the trees stood erect and motionless, not a leaf stirring, as if they had been moulded out of some sombre metal; all the colour had gone from the world; the river was dark and drumly; the houses, roads, embankments displayed the same melancholy hue; the impending heavens were livid and featureless, and bearing down on the earth as with the obscuration of an eclipse; the distant woods, and the cultivated uplands, and the higher hills beyond had almost disappeared behind the watery veil. Not a bird chirped in the bushes; the sea-gulls had all fled away back to the Moray Firth; the patient oxen out in the fields had drawn nearer to the hedge at the end of the garden, but indeed there was little shelter for them. The dining-room was dismal, wanting its usual display of flowers.

And yet, as the forenoon wore on, the loftier slopes of the Castle hill seemed to be looking at something afar off—seemed to be conscious of some light somewhere; there came a warmth into the grey-white tone of the skies, wet as they were; in time there was a faint suggestion of silver here and there as the rain lessened and lessened; the blackbirds began to 'click-click!' in the laurel bushes; over by the Devil's Kirn, under the drooping rowans and alders, one could almost have imagined that a trembling ray of sunshine had wandered down to touch the stealthy current; the air grew milder and more mild to the cheek; the skies were lifting; here and there a streak of faint turquoise blue declared itself overhead; a stirring of southerly wind

went through the leaves, and they seemed to be shaking themselves dry; and at last, with the Castle hill lighting up to a rich golden-green, and with a shivering of diamonds on the river, and with a universal jubilation in hedgerow and shrubbery, the splendour burst forth, and spread far and wide, while a rainbow spanning the Black Isle announced the retreat of the storm.

And with the breaking up of the heavens and the announcement of a glorious day there simultaneously entered the drawing-room of Glengarva House a young man, himself effulgent, radiant, and jocundly smiling; he was very smartly dressed, too, if rather in a horsey fashion ("well-groomed," Eelin said to herself contemptuously); and at once, when he had sat down, he began to entertain the two ladies with an account of various recent escapades and experiences of his own, which he appeared to regard as humorous. His talk was mainly addressed to Mrs. Macdonald—who responded with the gracious courtesy she extended to everyone; but all the while his admiring looks were bent upon Miss Eelin, who did not quite so graciously respond. Of course, when he spoke to her direct, she had to turn to him; and he seemed perfectly unaware that the measured civility of her manner and the calm observation of her eyes indicated only too clearly the immense distance that lay between him and her. The proud beauty of her features, the somewhat haughty expression of the lines of her lips, in nowise abashed him; nay, they rather attracted him; they tantalised him: this jade was worth the winning! And so he went on—after his apologies for having come too early: beaming he was, and self-satisfied, and happy, and facetious: he knew he was a devil of a fellow to fascinate the other sex. But how quickly her demeanour changed when there appeared at the door of the drawing-room a tall, broad-shouldered, fair-haired, uncouth-looking student, whose apprehensive shyness seemed to precede him as he advanced. And of course she was the first to meet him and welcome him; and now it was——

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist, how grateful I am to you! You have said in the *Observer* just what I was thinking! Will they see it, do you think?—the oafs—the cowards—to insult a woman like that! It was so kind of you! And I hope the writing did not keep you up too late!"

At this moment the mamma interposed, to introduce her guests, and with a single glance the two men seemed to take the measure of each other; then they all of them trooped into the dining-room, and took their places—a partie carrée.

And again Wild Eelin showed clearly enough in which direction she was determined to bestow her favour; for she turned aside from the continuous and complacent egotisms of the young peer, and did her very best to amuse her other neighbour. Nor was it difficult; for he was a quickly responsive audience; his low, quiet laugh followed her through her merry cantrips; and merry indeed she was, with all sorts of reckless paradoxes, and mischievous inventions, and impossible stories. Is it true that any Englishman ever remonstrated with an American for his interest in antiquities, informing him that there was nothing in Europe half so old as the American young man? Who was the American, on the other hand, who observed that the feature which had most impressed him in England was the gigantic forests, and, on being asked by an amazed Englishman what were these forests, replied—chestnuts? Which was the South American Republic that advertised in the newspapers, as an attraction to visitors, 'Revolutions got up while you wait?' These mad things flew about; and Archie Gilchrist laughed, to himself as it were; and Mountmahon looked puzzled—but none the less did he direct adoring glances towards the wilful, wayward, nimble-witted lass who seemed to be filling all the atmosphere with playful summer lightnings. Nor did the warm and adoring glances escape the observation of the other guest; and well could he surmise what was portended by them: it was not for him to harbour any protest. Only, there came back into his mind a dim, strange, half-pathetic wish he had formed that his mother, the old woman in Dingwall, should for a brief minute or so gaze upon, and perhaps say a word to, this brilliant and beautiful creature who had for a season honoured him, and lifted him up out of his proper station, by an acquaintanceship that he knew must end. That his mother and Eelin Macdonald of Kinvaig should meet, and look upon each other—that was now the summit of his ambition; and thereafter?—well, the Cape Mounted Police, most likely, and a haunting forgetfulness of the land of glens and hills.

Luncheon over, they returned to the drawing-room, and here again "White Cockade" continued her erratic flights of jesting and raillery and sarcasm, for she was in a gay mood; and if the droop of Lord Mountmahon's underlip showed that he did not always comprehend, nevertheless his delighted eyes could dwell on the animated colour of her complexion, and the audacity of her demeanour, and the handsome set of her head, even when it was turned away from him, as it generally was. But in time he grew fidgety: he looked at his watch once or twice; and at length he said—

"I'm sure you'll pardon me, Mrs. Macdonald; but you know I told you I had to leave by the three o'clock steamer; and if you wouldn't mind giving me a couple of minutes' quiet talk—out there in the garden——"

She rose at once, in gentle acquiescence; and Archie Gilchrist, not quite knowing what were the usages of polite society, rose also, and said he would bid her good-bye; whereupon Wild Eelin outdid all her previous effrontery.

"Are you going into the town, Mr. Gilchrist?" she said, in the most innocent fashion. "If you'll wait a moment till I get my Tam I'll walk in with you: I've a heap of things to do in the shops." And thus it was that the party was broken up—Mountmahon and his hostess passing out by the French window on to the lawn, where they could converse undisturbed.

"Gilchrist, did you say—Gilchrist?" asked his lordship, when they were out of hearing. "Rum-looking card. Too intelligent for a nob, and too modest for a snob: should take him to be a kind of newspaper Johnny."

"Mr. Gilchrist is on the staff of the Invernish *Observer*," responded his companion—who, poor soul, was all in a flutter: she guessed what was coming.

"Ha?—I have an eye, you see," continued his lordship, who was evidently highly pleased by the success of his conjecture. "I'm not blind. I can twig. And I shouldn't be surprised, now," he proceeded, more warily, "if there was something between those two?"

"Between—!"

"Yes: between your daughter and this newspaper chap: they seem pretty thick." He did not turn to her with this

inquiry: he was pressing down a daisy or two with the toe of his boot.

"Oh, but I assure you, Lord Mountmahon, there is nothing of that kind at all—oh no!" the mother said, with perhaps unnecessary emphasis. "Mr. Gilchrist is quite a recent acquaintance. But Eelin and he have much in common—literary schemes, and so forth; and they see a good deal of each other, no doubt; but there is nothing beyond that—"

"Well, now, my dear lady, let's have it out," he said, with a sudden burst of frankness. "If there's no one else in the way, I want to make your daughter my wife; there's the truth plump and plain; fair, square, and aboveboard—that's my motto. And I must have you on my side; that's what I've come for to-day; it's to secure your help—your advocacy; you must be on my side, don't you see, and then everything will go as right as a trivet. Oh, I know there are objections," he went on—for he noticed that involuntarily she had glanced at the mourning-band on his arm. "Too suddenly—too unexpected: that's what every well-conducted young lady is expected to exclaim; but supposing we take all that for granted, and come to business. Strike while the iron's hot—that's my motto. If a certain unfortunate accident is thought to be too recent—oh, well, it'll soon be forgotten; and I want your help, my dear lady—your persuasion; for there's no time like the present; you only live once; and if you let opportunities slip through your fingers, why, some other fellow steps in, don't you know—"

"But, Lord Mountmahon," Eelin's mother protested—and she was nervous and anxious and agitated, though she had clearly foreseen that this responsibility would be thrust upon her, "how can I do what you ask? It is far too serious a matter. Eelin must judge for herself: I dare not interfere. My life has been devoted to her: her happiness is my constant thought, day and night; and if any advice of mine were to be ill-judged, were to lead to some terrible disappointment, how could I bear that?"

"Oh, come, come," he said, good-humouredly. "Disappointment?—why—where—how—what? I would take pretty good care of her, you may depend: and I've knocked about; I know a trick or two; I tell you, she shall have

the best of everything. And I'm not such a bad sort of a cuss—with a little reform thrown in ; and that's what I'm bent on ; yes, I am : make it worth my while, and I'll do anything—in reason. In reason, of course. Champagne, now : they do say I drink too much champagne, and that I'll have gout, and lumbago, and sciatica, and every mortal kind of tomfoolery, sooner or later. Well, I'll stop now. Yes, I will. Excellent opportunity—a sufficient inducement. Not a drop more. Oh, I can practise self-denial when I choose ; yes, I can : blessed if I drink another drop of champagne. Beer for breakfast : claret at luncheon ; a good old port at dinner : and one or two whiskies and soda to finish up the night with—but not a drop of champagne. Then there's the fisticuffing crew : I'll have done with them ; yes, I will ; though it may be a tough job ; they're a roughish lot ; and if I drive them off they'll try to do me a mischief, I am well aware of that. But when youth and beauty calls, you've got to buck up ; and I imagine your daughter wouldn't care to come into contact with such an unruly gang. Then there's my gee-gees : capital excuse for getting rid of those old crocks—horse-hair trunks that have been fostered on me when I was half-screwed. I'll retire from the turf altogether—yes, I will—anything to please her—when the engagement is settled—"

"But, Lord Mountmahon, you don't know Eelin!" the mother exclaimed.

"Haven't I two eyes?" he retorted.

"But—but——"

"No, no ; no more 'but—buts,'" he said, with a most conquering smile. "You know quite well most girls would like the position ; and she shall have me for her humble and most obedient slave. And I can look after her : you trust me. Ask any one who knows me whether I can order a dinner or not ; just ask them ; can I order a dinner or can't I? And do you think I would lug her away to some foreign country, to stare at mountains and old castles? Not me! What do I care about mountains, or old castles either? A tidy suite of rooms at the Old Ship at Brighton —fine October weather—a well-mettled team waiting for you every morning at eleven ; that's my idea of a honeymoon ; and away you go to the tootle-too of the horn—Lewes—Worthing—Eastbourne—anywhere ; then a rattling

good lunch; and back in the afternoon in plenty of time to dress for dinner. That's living. That's doing things well and proper. She'd be looked after, don't you fear. And I'm not difficult to get on with. I call myself rather good-natured; yes I do. If she was late in getting ready, I wouldn't quarrel; I can pass the time first-rate; killin' flies with an elastic band would do——"

"An elastic band?" repeated the Bean-an-Tighearn; the happy loquacity of this young man had rather bewildered her.

"Oh, yes, don't you know? If the flies have been worrying you during your quiet snoozle in the morning before breakfast, or in the afternoon perhaps, you can begin and take it out of them: a tolerably big elastic band, and a little practice in firing will soon get you even with them. You can't shoot them flying—I'll admit that; but you've just got them on toast when they're walking about the table or settled on the wall; for they can't see this missile until it's on to them like a hundred o' bricks. Well, as I was saying, I'm easily amused. I'm not difficult to get on with. Of course, I know it's an awful lottery, is marriage. You never can tell whether the woman will turn out a sulker or a giddy prattler—"

"Is there no other kind of woman, Lord Mountmahon?" his companion asked.

"Yes, there is," he answered, with conviction. "There is the woman who is a combination—who sulks to you and giddy-prattles to everybody else. However, we're not going to anticipate evil, on this auspicious occasion. For it is an auspicious occasion, isn't it? And you'll carry my message to the young lady; and you'll plead my cause; and let me have her answer as soon as possible. I shall be down at Kinvaig until Thursday next: a postcard—a sixpenny telegram—would send me into a seventh heaven of delight; and then, naturally, all the formal wooing could be proceeded with at one's leisure, when once the engagement was understood. Tell her, if I haven't got refinement—that's what they talk about as if it was a kind of religion—if I haven't got culture—that's what they call it—culture!—the Jugginses who don't know a horse's fetlocks from his withers—at least I'd stand by her in sickness: ah, wouldn't I, though! It's all very well of my uncles to talk of me as

The Hog—pretty language—elegant language—The Hog: at all events I don't condescend to call names, or I might say something about them too—the sanctimonious humbugs—clinging on to the coat-tails of the sky-pilots!—put a penny in the slot, and out'll come a snivelling hymn! Well, I must be off: just enough time to get back to the hotel and drive along to the steamer. And you'll let me know, Mrs. Macdonald, won't you? A postcard—a sixpenny telegram—sent down to Kinvaig——"

"But, surely——"

"Now, now, my dear lady," he said, with laughing impetuosity, "I must stop all those 'buts.' If it were Miss Eelin herself, I could understand; the coyness and reluctance shown by a young damsel is only a part of the game."

"I will take your message, Lord Mountmahon," said the mother.

"With a little persuasion added?" he interposed, insidiously.

But this woman, gentle as she might be and generously disposed towards all created things, was also scrupulously honest.

"I—I cannot pledge myself," she said, trembling the while.

"But you'll do your best for me, won't you?" he said, confidently. "And I shall be looking out for the telegram, don't you forget! Happy is the wooing that isn't long a-doing—that's my motto. And the young lady can be as coy as ever she likes; and I'll be as patient a lover as ever was seen—in reason, don't you know—in reason: procrastination is the thief of time. Yes, and by Jove I'll miss my steamer! Good-bye, Mrs. Macdonald. I am relying on you, mind. If a girl turns out flighty, her mother can show her what the common-sense of things is. And don't forget about the Old Ship at Brighton. Tell her that: that'll fetch her: she'll be well looked after—you trust to me. Good-bye—good-bye!" And therewith he hurried away—leaving behind him a very miserable woman.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ESCAPADE.

Now when Eelin Macdonald and Archie Gilchrist set off to walk into the town of Invernish it would have been hard to say which of them was the more embarrassed; but presently her sense of fun predominated; she knew that she had flung herself, as it were, on this extremely modest young man; and she knew also that it lay with her to rescue him out of his shyness. And so she said, with a most ingenuous air (the laughter in her eyes demurely concealing itself)—

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist, I suppose you are quite familiar with the poems and songs of Hector Macneill?"

"Yes, indeed," he said, emphatically. It was an immeasurable relief to him to find something suggested about which he could talk with knowledge; for this crowning favour of hers had somewhat unnerved him; it had never entered into his imagination that Miss Eelin and himself would be walking into the town together—in the daylight, too—so that all folk should see.

"Well, I hope you will agree with me that he has never had sufficient recognition?" she proceeded—and the laughter in her eyes was decorously dying out.

"I am convinced of it," he said, with energy. "Burns gets everything, Hector Macneill nothing—I mean, from the literary world. But I can tell you this, Miss Macdonald, that among the working classes in Scotland Hector Macneill is oftener sung than Burns. I know. I was a clerk in Struthers's, in Union Street; and I had to take the keys in the morning; and I could hear what the men would be singing to themselves, at their work in the early hours. Was it Burns? No, it was not. It was 'Dinna think, bonnie lassie, I'm gaun to leave thee.' Or it was 'Jeanie's

black e'e.' Or it was 'Whaur hae ye been a' the day, my boy Tammy.' Or it was 'Come under my plaidie, the nicht's gaun to fa'.' And when one of the girls in the shop—Struthers being out—took to humming something, as like as not it would be 'I ne'er lo'ed a laddie but ane, and he ne'er lo'ed a lassie but me.' Bulk for bulk I say there's better stuff in Hector Macneill's songs than in Burns's. Ah, but it's little use talking that way; for every now and again, amid all the obvious insincerity, Burns comes out with a line that is like a flame—so true it is, and transcending. Who but he could have written 'O my love is like a red, red rose'—?"

He had turned to her; there was a tremor of emphasis in his speech—insomuch that she lowered her eyes; nor did he know that he was addressing her so earnestly until one of two small boys who were on the river-bank called out, in the vilest of south-country accents, to his companion—

"Oh, jist hear till him, Jock! They're laud and lass, thae twa! Fegs, they're no blate!"

And then Wild Eelin, with her colour consciously mantling—and extremely mortified that such should be the case—hurried on with the discourse.

"Don't you think," said she, "that it would be only fair if an edition of Macneill's songs and poems were brought out—to give him a fair chance?——"

"Why, again and again I have thought of it!" he exclaimed. "Only, his literary baggage is not great. I have sometimes wondered whether Tannahill might not be added in to such a volume——"

"Why not?" she said.

"If you knew, as I know," he went on, "how deep in the hearts of the poorer of our Scotch folk lie Tannahill's songs—singing themselves there, in a kind of way——"

"Oh, but surely I do know," she protested. "Does not everybody know? 'Loudon's Bonnie Woods and Braes'——"

"And 'Jessie, the Flower o' Dumblane'——"

"Ay; and 'Let us go, lassie, go, to the braes o' Balquither'——"

"And 'O, are ye sleepin', Maggie.'"

"And 'Gloomy winter's now awa','" she continued, capping him at every turn.

"And 'Thou Bonnie Wood o' Craigielea'—there were two of the girls in the shop could sing that very well as a duet—when Struthers chanced to be out."

"And then there's 'Barrochan Jean'——"

But at this he looked puzzled.

"Barrochan—?"

And then she took to laughing as she repeated the lines—

> "'Tis hinna ye heard, man, o' Barrochan Jean?
> And hinna ye heard, man, o' Barrochan Jean!
> How death and starvation came o'er the haill nation,
> She wrought sic mischief wi' her twa pawky e'en;
> The lads and the lasses were dying in dizzens,
> The taen killed wi' love, and the tither wi' spleen;
> The ploughing, the sawing, the shearing, the mawing,
> A' wark was forgotten for Barrochan Jean."

"Miss Macdonald—" said he, when she interrupted him.

"Mr. Gilchrist," said she, "I am going to ask you to call me by my right name. I am 'Miss Macdonald' only to strangers."

"Oh, it is so kind of you, Miss Eelin, then," he said, blushing very hotly; "we might bring out a volume combining the two poets—Macneill and Tannahill——"

"Why, that is an excellent idea!" she cried, gaily, as she swung along—and she seemed to be extremely happy—she appeared to have escaped from something—she was rejoicing in this companionship and its sympathetic communion of souls. "A plain, unpretentious volume, easily within the means of those who would appreciate it most. I think Mr. Edel would publish it for us. It would not be a costly venture. Then there would have to be an explanatory introduction, and a biography of each of the poets, and notes; I would do the one memoir—Hector Macneill for choice—if you will do the other; but of course your name alone would be on the title page as editor——"

"But why, Miss Eelin?" he remonstrated.

"Oh, well," she answered him lightly, "you are a professional, you know—you are a man of letters—and I am only an amateur——"

"Miss Eelin, you do not understand," he continued, anxiously, "for it will put clearer the relationship between you and me, while that lasts. I am not a man of letters at

all! It is only a matter of weeks since I joined the staff of the Invernish *Observer*. Before that I was a clerk in Struthers's shop. I wanted you to know—so that there should be no false pretences—and then you will not say that I had presumed, that I had deceived you—when—when you choose to pass on—"

"Pass on?" she repeated.

"Well," said he—and he was unmistakably agitated, "when the Queen, up there in the Highlands, at Braemar or Balmoral, stops some poor cottar or shepherd-lad, and says a few kindly words to him, it is nothing to her; it is merely the generous instinct of the moment; she passes on, and forgets. But as for him he has received the crowning honour and treasure of his life—its one memory to cherish and be proud of—"

Perhaps there was something in the tone of his voice; perhaps there was something of mere physical breathlessness; perhaps an unusual pallor in his cheeks; but at all events Wild Eelin came to consider that the situation was extremely critical—she hardly knew why. And she said to him, almost reproachfully—

"I can hardly guess at your meaning, Mr. Gilchrist; but if it is what it seems to be, why, was there ever such an absurd exaggeration! Where's your gospel? Where's your badge of liberty and equality? Have you forgotten that 'a man's a man for a' that'?"

He pulled himself up. He had achieved his object. He had given her to understand. He had cleared the ground. And if now she still wished to extend some small measure of favour toward him, good and well; but if the Queen chose to pass on without another thought of the poor wayfarer, that also was good and well; and he would hold his treasure of remembrance, and be grateful with a life-long gratitude.

"Oh," he said, rather shamefacedly. "'A man's a man for a' that' is more a definition of the attitude of a man towards other men—"

"Oh, is that it?" she said, mocking at him. "Then you cut out half the human race from the application of your braggart song? That is something, at least. That is a concession. Well, now, Mr. Gilchrist, be guided by me; and we'll cut out the other half; and we'll reduce that famous piece to what it is—not the expression of the

sentiment of the human race, of half the human race, or any section of the human race, but the expression of a single individual's irritable and morbid jealousy and envy and vanity."

But at this he burst out laughing; he knew she was merely trying to make mischief—to pick a quarrel with him; and so all he said to this saucy damsel was—

"I'm glad we've got past the Castle hill."

"Why?" she demanded.

"Because it would have fallen on us if it had overheard."

By this time they were come to the Suspension-bridge; but she did not strike off at right angles to go into the town; she continued on her way along the river-front, so that now they were passing the open space into which Iain Ruadh had collected his sheep, while on the other side was the dingy black-grey building of the Invernish *Observer*. She regarded the lugubrious-looking square stone block, with its small, dim windows.

"I suppose it is all shut up?" she said.

"Oh, yes," he answered her. "Not a soul in the place, I should imagine, on a Saturday afternoon."

"I have never been over a printing establishment," she observed vaguely.

"Oh, but if you would like to look through," said he, with an instant alertness, "I can easily manage that. The old woman who keeps the keys lives just across the lane: she would come and unlock door by door for us. What do you say? Would you like it?"

"I should like it immensely!" she answered him without a moment's hesitation: she was always ready for any kind of haphazard adventure.

And so, in a few minutes' time, these two were being ushered into a sombre passage leading from the lane into the interior of the building; at the end of the passage they found a corkscrew little stair, by which they gained the corridor above; and then the old woman with the keys proceeded to conduct them through the mysterious and silent offices, herself as silent as her surroundings. It was an eerie kind of perambulation. The long composing-room, in especial, had an aspect of absolute loneliness and desolation; not even a friendly ghost was there, standing at one of the

cases, setting up imaginary type. As for the dark masses of metal in the engine-room, a still deeper gloom enveloped these; and there was a kind of threatening air about their cold and slumbering strength: they seemed to resent this intrusion upon their profound solitude and stillness. Sometimes Wild Eelin, who was an impressionable sort of young woman, drew back a little: she did not care to penetrate further into those gulfs of shadow.

And then the explorers got them away to the front part of the building, which was of a more cheerful outlook; and here they took possession of Mr. Grieve's room, with its bound files of the London papers, its rows of books of reference, its atlases, manuals, dictionaries and directories, and, conspicuous on the writing-table in the middle of the floor, its tin canister of tobacco. Eelin, who loved the light rather than the darkness, quickly recovered her spirits; nay, when she had examined everything with the greatest interest and curiosity, she grew merry and mischievous; she would have Mr. Grieve know of this unpardonable visitation; she would leave a message for him, as from the land of spirits, and pin it on to his desk.

"What then," said she, turning to her companion, and fixing those glorious blue eyes of hers on his with a quite unthinking fearlessness of challenge, "what do you think? Rhyme? A little posy, with a knot of ribbon tied round the foot? It must be awfully clever, you know, to atone for our abominable impudence in coming into his room. And I'm not very good at impromptus," she continued, sadly. "My little jests are of the escalier——"

"I don't think you would find other people say so, Miss Eelin," he observed, smiling: indeed he had himself recollections of the shafts of summer lightning that she could send (herself giggling all the while) round an afternoon tea-table when she had been provoked.

"But begin, Mr. Gilchrist, begin!" she said, impatiently —and she sate down, and got hold of a writing-pad. "Tell me what to say—*Ode to a Sub-Editor found absent*—how shall we begin? *O wilding bird that for a time hast flown, from out—from out the downy shelter of thy nest, By what far streamlets flutterest thou alone, by what—by what—by what dim valleys in the golden west?* Go on, Mr. Gilchrist —now you go on!"

"Not I!" he said, "when you are doing so magnificently!" But in truth he was hardly thinking of the sham poetry: rather he was thinking of the extraordinary charm and fascination that the mere presence of this splendid creature seemed to confer on these poor offices. Would the atmosphere ever lose this radiance that now permeated it? Would he ever, coming into this room, see anything but a vision occupying the sub-editor's chair—the vision of a young girl, gay, self-confident, serene, her beautiful profile bent down over the paper, the homespun jacket showing the perfect lines of her figure, the dark-blue Tam o' Shanter perched on the bountiful and bunched-up masses of her raven-black hair? And the pen that she held in her fingers: the moment she was gone he would come swiftly back and annex that: if it chanced to be some favourite of Grieve's, so much the worse for Grieve; he could not relinquish so personal a souvenir of this memorable and enchanting escapade.

And meanwhile Wild Eelin was beating her brains: She even bit at the end of her pen—making it a thousand times more valuable in the eyes of the future possessor.

"Why don't you help me, Mr. Gilchrist?" she said, peevishly.

And then he dashed boldly in.

"*How knowst thou, fluttering by yon western shore,*" he began.

"Yes?" she said, by way of encouragement.

"*Two raging cuckoos have usurped thy den—*"

"Oh that's ridiculous!" she protested; but he went on doggedly:

"*Thy special writing pad they've scribbled o'er; And now methinks they'll steal away thy pen.*"

He had hardly uttered the words when an alarming crash occurred just behind him, and a large stone, hurled through one of the windows, came rolling to his feet. He wheeled round; the old woman with the keys shrieked and shrieked, as another and another missile came smashing through; and Eelin sat upright in her chair, her wide-apart, animal-like eyes all alert and observant—but not with fear. No, there was no trace of fear in the Juno eyes; but the proud and imperious set of the mouth had become a trifle fixed.

"Come back from the windows, Mr. Gilchrist," said she.

"I know what it is. The rabble of lads whom you slashed at in this morning's *Observer*, have come to have their revenge; and they think there's no one in the building; so that they can break a few windows with impunity——"

"Oh, do they think that?" said he, with a hurried glance outside. "Do they think that?" His heart was ablaze with wrath. That the beautiful little romance of this afternoon's adventure—and even while Miss Eelin was pretending to write poetry in the sub-editor's chair—should be summarily brought to an end by the same young blackguards who had disgraced themselves in the theatre the evening before!

"Stay where you are," said he, peremptorily, "I shall not be long."

He dashed into the composing-room and looked eagerly around, but nothing in the shape of a weapon could he find anywhere, until his eye lit on an old, broken cane-bottomed chair that lay in a corner, and that he took up and wrenched limb from limb, until there remained in his hands a most unholy four-edged implement. Then he went out. It was rather in a sneaking way that he passed down the lane. He professed to be paying no attention to this assemblage of unruly louts, who were doubtless greatly enjoying the amusement of breaking the window-panes of an empty building. But when he had got well to the rear of them he charged—charged like a whirlwind upon them: knocking this one down, hurling that one over, and then, whenever three or four were found together, the impetuous, promiscuous, irresistible belabouring began, with this godless instrument that seemed to have been invented for the crushing of bones. The fury of Ajax increased. His eyes were red-hot. The leg of the cane-bottomed chair appeared to be flying to all points of the compass, but invariably the end of the trajectory was the head or shoulders of the vagabond who chanced to be tallest or nearest. Those grubby masses of humanity parted—halted—retreated—scattered themselves—looking back in amazement none the less. For this onslaught had been so sudden that a general consternation had been produced before they had time to realise that they were being attacked by only one man. It is true some eight or ten of the cubs did form up at the foot of the lane; and it would have gone dismally hard with

Archie Gilchrist if there had been stones about ; but there were not—for the roadway here is of hard and worn macadam ; and the hobbledehoys had exhausted the ammunition they had brought with them ; so that when he went straight for the middle of this group, they simply fell away from before him, to get out of the reach of that awful truncheon. And then of a sudden there was a warning whistle ; some one had espied a policeman hurrying across the Suspension-bridge ; and in about three seconds the rioters had vanished into thin air. When the policeman arrived there was no tumult to quell ; but the windows of the *Observer* office presented a sorry sight.

Then he went back to the door in the lane ; and who was this but Wild Eelin herself awaiting him—laughing and giggling and immensely delighted. As for him, he was a trifle breathless ; and perhaps also a little ashamed of the violence of his rage.

"Well, that was a fine *millee*, as they say in the Lowlands," she called to him, as he approached.

"Why, what do you know of it ?" he demanded. "Didn't I tell you to keep back from the windows ?"

"Likely !—when I had a little Armageddon all spread out for my own benefit ! Most interesting ! I suppose a real battle is something like that—with a little more colour and smoke thrown in. But I must hurry on now, Mr. Gilchrist. I've torn up the lines to Mr. Grieve ; I thought he mightn't understand. Good-bye ; and thank you ever so much for showing me over the building."

And so they parted ; and at once he went up to Tom Grieve's room, to secure the nibbled penholder. He did not immediately return, though the old woman of the keys was waiting patiently below. For this commonplace apartment had undergone a sort of transfiguration—since a young lady had been seated at that actual desk there, her blue-bonneted head bent over the paper, her tones, merry, or petulant, or remonstrant, sounding strange—and yet so sweet and so entrancing—in the all-pervading silence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A FRIEND AND ALLY.

Miss Eelin's shopping was soon over; and then in a casual kind of way she went round to the Caledonian Hotel, to inquire after her venerable friend. She found him in the verandah overlooking the fragrant and brilliant garden-plots; and a proud man was he—this great, white-bearded, blind giant, when he rose on her approach, and stretched out both hands to welcome her.

"It is kindly done of you, and more than I expected," said he, as she took a seat beside him, and made herself comfortable, while Angus went off to order tea. "I was just listening to the hammers over there—do you hear them?"

Plainly enough, across the wide river, came the multitudinous *click-click!* that told of the workmen getting ready the grounds devoted to the Highland Games.

"And I was saying to myself 'Yes, yes; hurry on, hurry on: it will be a gay week the next week; and of course Miss Eelin is just as busy with her preparations as the rest of them—ball-dresses, and tartan-sashes, and the like—and it's not to be expected that she'll have a thought to send in this direction.' And yet here you are!"

"Yes, here I am," said she, blithely, "and here I mean to remain, until Angus sends the tea. For I'm safe here. Oh, it's a dreadful town this, Mr. Macdonald! There is no order or government; every one takes the law into his own hand; and no one thinks of interfering. Why, I have just heard of a man having been beaten black and blue for selling bad fruit to children——"

"And serve him right!" was the instantaneous comment.

"Ah, there it is, you see," she went on, sadly. "There

it is. That is the result of living in a lawless atmosphere. Do you know what I saw only a few minutes ago? Why, there was a whole rabble of lads breaking the windows of a house; and when the occupant came running out, what does he do? Send for the police? Not at all. He has got hold of a lump of furniture, and he goes smashing amongst them right and left—scattering them in every direction—a tall young man he was, and broad-shouldered, with fair hair rather long, so that he really looked like a Scandinavian berserker—a berserker gone mad with fury—and you should have seen how they fled like sheep every time he charged them. But I ask you, Mr. Macdonald, is this a Christian town? Is this the nineteenth century? Are we supposed to have some sort of government and means of keeping order? I wonder you should choose to live in such a place!"

"And will I tell ye, Miss Eelin," said he, rather gently, "what makes me like to linger on here, even when Angus and I have been planning other excursions?"

"What, then?"

"Well, just the chance of hearing a word of your voice, Miss Eelin—as at the present moment. Though I did not expect it this time. No, I did not. I thought ye would be all taken up with your finery for the dances—"

"Mr. Macdonald," she said, in something of a hurt way, "I wish you to understand. I don't want to go to either of the balls; and if I can find any reasonable excuse, I shall not go."

"Bless me!" he exclaimed. "Bless me! At your time of life—I thought they would be great events. And especially with all the old Highland families represented—and who with a prouder position than Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig?"

"Mamma has been very kind about my dresses," she continued; "and—and perhaps it would disappoint her; perhaps I may have to go; but I would much rather not; indeed, indeed, I would much rather come and sit by you, and read to you, those two evenings——"

"Miss Eelin, are you out of your mind!" he remonstrated with her. "You that must take your place, ay, among the best of them! And who will outshine her young ladyship of Kinvaig? Ah, but I've heard. I warrant ye, I've

heard. You think a blind man cannot see; but he can listen—from this one and that; and he can make a kind of picture. Well, well, though I am not to be there, I know who will hold her own. I know who will have her card of the dances first filled. And if I must tell you the truth, Miss Eelin, I've kind of taken a little bit liberty. I just wanted to feel that I had a small share, the smallest share, in your splendour—for I know what's going to happen on those two evenings: I can hear. And you'll forgive me; you'll not think it impertinent; but rather the privilege of an old man; and besides something must be allowed for the pride of one's name. . . . Are you there, Angus?—Angus!"

Angus was not within hearing; but at this point a waiter appeared, bringing along the tea-tray; and he was sent off in search. In about a minute or so—while Eelin was presiding at the little table—Angus turned up; and from his master he received certain half-whispered instructions and a bunch of keys; then he went away. When he returned he was carrying in his hand a flat box about eight inches square, covered in dark blue morocco.

And while Miss Eelin was busy with cup and saucer, old Allan Macdonald opened the jewellery case, and passed his fingers lightly and caressingly over the contents. These were a necklace and a small pair of ear-rings, apparently copied from an Etruscan design; the necklace consisting of a series of equal-sized golden shells, each pendent little cup containing a solitary diamond of purest water. That was the ostensible feature—a string of diamonds; but besides that, and between each two of the shells, and also pendent though by a shorter golden thread, there was a tiny blob of coral; the result being that there were really two circlets—the inner and thinner one of pale pink dots, the outer one the lustrous blaze of the cut stones. It was a pretty combination of colour—the gold, and pale pink, and white; while the naive simplicity of the design was not the least admirable feature of this beautiful thing, which otherwise might have appeared a trifle too sumptuous for a girlish neck.

When Eelin had given him his cup of tea, he handed over the open case.

"Miss Eelin, will you tell me what you think of that? Tell me frankly—quite frankly—for perhaps there's something else."

If he could have seen the sudden look of admiration that leapt into her face and filled her eyes, he would not have doubted much.

"They're good stones," he said. "I made sure of that. I went to both Edinburgh and Glasgow; and I had experts with me. Maybe I should have waited until Somerled came back; but then, with these two assemblies next week—Well, and what do you think of it, Miss Eelin—"

"It is perfectly lovely!" she cried—and the tone of her voice told him all he wanted to know. "It is perfectly exquisite! The gracefulness of it—the simplicity—and the beautiful colour—and the brilliancy——"

"Ay, ay, do you say that!" he interposed, eagerly, and in great delight. "Did not I tell you, then, that I wished to add my mite to your triumph, when you go among those people next week. 'And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift,'" he added, smiling at his own cleverness.

"Yes," said Eelin, regarding the radiant coil, "indeed it is fit for a king's daughter—but not for me."

"My dear young lady," said he, "you're going to make me very happy by accepting my little present, and not another word more about it. I told you it was an old man's privilege——"

"But, Mr. Macdonald, I am overwhelmed!" she protested. "How shall I ever be able to thank you—"

"Not another word—not a single word," he insisted.

"Will you let me send you a message in Gaelic," she said, desperately, "after I get home this evening?"

"Ah, yes, that!—yes, that—" he answered her, with obvious satisfaction. "That, if you like—and if you think it is worth while, my dear."

So this matter was settled; and then they proceeded to speak of other affairs—chiefly in connection with the great events of the following week; but by-and-bye Eelin said—with a timidity and embarrassment that of course he could not perceive—

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald—I—I think you mentioned something about your son coming back to this country. Have you—had any news, then?"

"Plenty of news—plenty of news," he answered her, "but perhaps not quite so explicit as one could wish. You see, Somerled understands well enough that his letters to

me must be read by a third person; and although we have a cypher-code between us, it is not easy to make everything clear about the railway matters without mentioning names; and then again it might be mischievous if information got into the papers prematurely. There's no one can overhear us?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Not a soul near!" she responded.

"For there'll be a fine revelation out there ere long!" he continued. "The Lad has had it all his own way—indeed, he is a deevil of determination; and when the great amalgamation is declared, the wreckers will find their feet just cut from under them. But I must not trouble you with such things, Miss Eelin; I cannot expect you to understand them—"

"No, I only wished to hear whether your son was coming back soon—to keep you company——"

"Well, now, that's strange!" said the tall, old, white-bearded man. "For the Lad has got some daft idea into his head that he would like to come over here and settle down for good—or perhaps merely rent a place for a year or two by way of trial—now that he can leave everything safe and secure on the other side. Miss Eelin, was I telling you that I did very well at Altnaharra, at the trolling?" he went on, with a bit of a chuckle. "Ay, indeed, the old doited blind body did better than the sharpest-eyed o' them all; and will I tell ye the reason? When the two rods are out at the stern of the boat, and when the trolling has begun, if ye chance to see that the point of one of the rods is trembling, it's just not in mortal man to refrain from snatching that rod up, and as like as not ye pull the phantom minnow away from the fish; whereas the poor old blind body is under no such temptation; he lets the rod alone until the fish has well hooked itself; and then the skirl of the reel is plenty of warning. And Somerled has been ever too busy a man to learn fly-fishing; but he could manage the trolling; and him and me might have many a happy day on one o' the Highland lochs. And yet I don't understand him. Sometimes he writes as if he would like to come; and again he writes as if he was afraid of this country. He's a strange lad altogether. Hard-headed in business as he is, he has queer, erratic notions sometimes; but they lie deep down. He is not a talker."

Old Allan Macdonald, at all events, was—when his son Somerled was the subject; and Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave listened with a concentration of interest which at least encouraged him by its silence.

"It's seldom that a young man of thirty can say to himself that he has done enough of the world's work to leave him free to consider how he should occupy himself otherwise. Of course, he had a good start. I put him on a good platform. But I was getting old and losing my nerve; I could not have dared to do what he has done; and maybe I could not have got as many people to follow me. But he is the strangest rascal! Money he cares not one doit for, except as an instrument. Success and power he has striven for—and won; but piling up money as an end in itself, that he passes by as futile. And so, my dear young lady, if you should ever hear of that boy of mine doing something that sounds rather wild, do not you think that he has lost his wits. It may sound eccentric; but there will be a reason in it, sufficient for himself, at any rate; and that's all he cares for. I suppose that's all he cares for. If he were to do some splendid thing, some magnanimous thing, as like as not he would keep himself entirely in the background, so that no one should ever know. He's the oddest combination. They're level-headed fellows out there in Canada—the company-promoters and financiers; and yet they follow the young railway-king like a flock of children. Yes; and some day or other they'll be hearing of some frantic act of generosity——"

"Mr. Macdonald," said she, demurely, "doesn't he inherit that failing?"

"I beg your pardon——?"

"Doesn't he inherit that failing of reckless generosity? I am holding a box in my hands."

"I tell you this, Miss Eelin," he answered her, warmly, "that if Somerled were here at this moment, and if I were to say to him, 'It is the wish of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig that you go down to the Suspension-bridge there, and walk out to the middle of it, and throw yourself headlong into the river,' do you think he would refuse?"

"I hope he wouldn't do anything so perfectly mad!" she exclaimed—but all the same her face was suffused with colour.

"I should be ashamed of him if he hesitated for a moment!" the old man said.

"But, Mr. Macdonald," she protested, almost piteously, "that exaggerated devotion and loyalty to an old family name is quite an anachronism——"

"Is it?" he said. "Well, it may be so. Perhaps it does not accord very well with modern sentiments of independence. Perhaps it is only a tradition; but it is a tradition that is faithfully and affectionately cherished, not only here and there among the glens of the old country but among the settlements and the pinewood clearances far across the seas. Why, you know, Miss Eelin, as well as I know, that that devoted loyalty throbs and burns in many a heart, and nowhere more ardently than among the folk whose message I bring to you, from thousands of miles away—"

"It puts one into so false a position!" she said. "So much is expected of you. It's all very well for Lochiel or Cluny: they can do so much for their people; but what can my mother and I do for the scattered remnant of the House of Kinvaig? We can appreciate their kindly affection—so simple and earnest it is; but what can we offer them in return? We are but the shadow of a shade. We have no power or influence—"

"Ah, but you might have—you might have," he half-muttered to himself, "if some of those fanatic Macdonalds of Ontario had their way."

As Eelin walked quickly home that evening, safeguarding her resplendent treasure in the blue box, she found herself unexpectedly furnished with a protector. He was a small, dark, iron-grey terrier, with alert and intelligent eyes and alert and expressive ears; and, having apparently dropped down from nowhither at all, he forthwith proceeded to take possession of her. But he was a very cunning little dog. At first he would not even look at her; he merely walked ahead of her, some four or five yards being between them, his deportment of the gravest, like that of some miniature major-domo. Only once or twice was there a swift, half-concealed backward glance, to make sure she was coming; and occasionally there was a low growl sent forward, as a warning to evil-doers to be gone. Now this was perplexing; for she was always getting into trouble through stray dogs following her home—old Maxwell the gardener having to

waste hour after hour in seeking for owners; while as for summarily dismissing this small and important person who had become her self-elected champion, she could not think of so wounding his dignity—probably he was a contributor to the *Spectator*. Accordingly she tried his own stratagem; she feigned not to see him; she halted, and leaned an arm on the iron rail, and looked abroad and across the wide-shivering silver stream, to the far row of elms that spread themselves fan-like against the glow of the western skies. She listened to the hammering of the workmen in the distant enclosure—to the muffled calling of children in still remoter playgrounds. And then she came back—warily—warily—only to find that the little iron-grey terrier was still there, stealthily and steadily watching her with vigilant and sagacious black eyes.

And then, throwing off deceit and wile, she strode forward to him, and addressed him in angry tones:

"Now, Peterkin, I tell you it's no use; it's no good your pretending to be a friend of mine, for I never saw you before. Why don't you go away home? If you come with me, do you know what will happen? You'll be locked up in the tool-house; and I'll have to pay for an advertisement in the *Observer;* and the people who own you will come out grumbling and saying they never wanted any advertisement. Go away, do you hear? Go back into the town—off—off!"

Now the effect on Peterkin, if such were by accident his name, of this objurgation was most surprising; it seemed to send him into a perfect ecstacy of delight. He squirmed and grinned, and grovelled; he danced about; he clutched the earth with outstretched deprecating fore-paws, and buried his nose in them; he wriggled his body like an adder swimming across a salmon-pool; then his murmuring whines broke into one or two joyous yelps, as he made a dash upward, to meet the expected caress of her hand.

"Come, come," said she, severely, "this nonsense won't do at all. I must be getting on, whatever you may be after."

But the moment she resumed her route he again and instantly took up his position as guardian, walking in advance of her with important demeanour, and ever and again turning round as much as to say 'You trust to me.

Don't be afraid. I'll keep the road clear for you.' In especial his eye was fixed on three half-bred fox-terriers which, at the near end of the Suspension-bridge, were slowly walking round each other with tails stiffened and erect. A general outbreak of war seemed imminent; but Peterkin did not deign to intervene; he maintained an attitude of calm observation; if he and his mistress were allowed to go by in peace, he would not seek to join in a vulgar squabble. Far otherwise was it when his attention was claimed by the other side of the river; for there indeed were lions in the path—a huge St. Bernard and a large black retriever, that were idly wandering about the further end of the bridge, and that at once awoke his ire. He growled to bid them depart. Then, seeing they took no heed, he flew down the grassy bank to the water-side, and a series of explosive barks rang out across the stream, cutting the air with their shrill anger. And then he trotted back to his post, looking up as he went by to his mistress for a word of approval.

"Yes, it's all very well, Peterkin," said she, to her valiant champion, "to challenge big dogs when they're on the other side of a wide river—that is wise and prudent. But you forget that we have to cross the Suspension-bridge, and that either of those animals can just snap your head off if it likes."

However, as it turned out, the large, slow, melancholy-eyed St. Bernard and the fat and curly old retriever paid no attention to the courageous Peterkin, who, on Eelin's arrival at Glengarva House, was forthwith handed over to the ministrations of Maxwell the gardener. Maxwell declared him to be a young dog of a most famous and valuable breed; and knew there would be handbills all over the town on the following Monday; there was no need for Miss Eelin to encroach on her pocket-money for any advertisement. And so, promising Peterkin to come and take him out for a stroll on the intervening day, she went into the house. Her heart, that had been cheered up a bit and interested by this little adventure, seemed now to sink somewhat: the prevailing silence appeared to be a silence of foreboding.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CROSS-PURPOSES.

When mother and daughter met in the drawing-room before dinner, they regarded each other askance and apprehensively —for the first time in their lives.

"I have a message for you, Eelin," said the former; "an important message, from Mountmahon. It is a proposal of marriage."

The poor woman was trembling a little: it was the girl who was outwardly calm.

"Yes?" said Eelin. One could have imagined that she was somewhat taller than her wont: perhaps it was the proud set of her head.

"And he wished me to plead his cause for him," the mother continued. "Of course, I will not do that; I cannot do that. The decision must be entirely your own. You must be left wholly unbiassed. There is nothing I would not dare or risk for you, Eelin, as you know; but not this —not this! Neither for nor against have I a word to say."

Curiously enough, by mere accident and absently and aimlessly Eelin had stepped up to the framed Genealogical Tree of the Macdonalds and Macdonnells, beginning with the Argyllshire Thane who married the Daughter of the King of the Isles; and she was vaguely contemplating the long ramifications, even up to the loftiest branches, where perhaps some day, in one of those small circles there might have to be inscribed *Eelin Macdonald, married*——

"But surely, mother," she said, slowly, "you ought to tell me what you yourself expect of me. Perhaps even what others might expect. I suppose if you inherit an ancient name, there are duties attached. I suppose it would be cowardly to avoid—to avoid—something of personal sacrifice,

if that were demanded. I dare say one owes something to one's family—to the family history——" She had been talking as if in a reverie; but of a sudden she appeared to come back to herself and her actual surroundings; and there was a natural ring of scorn in the next few words: "But at least, mother, he might have waited till the earth had settled on his wife's grave!"

"My dear child!" said the mother, imploringly. "Why will you give way to such violent prejudices? I did think you might be able to make allowances, and be a little generous. Lord Mountmahon has been a spoilt child all his life—that I have always heard. Too soon his own master, never any proper training or proper companions: how can you wonder that he should be impatient and headstrong? And mind you this, Eelin, his very impetuosity may be a compliment to yourself; and he is quite willing that if you only give him a favourable answer, the formal and open wooing may be as long as ever you like. At all events, he says so, though I imagine his habit of carrying everything before him would reassert itself, and he would be for having a speedy wedding—"

"Mother—mother!" the girl cried, as if she had been struck.

"No, no, I should not have said that!" the mother responded at once—so piteously eager was she that her daughter should have this proposal placed fairly and dispassionately before her. "Probably it would not be so. No doubt he would wait a fitting time. His hurry to get a telegram or post-card sent down to Kinvaig—well, that is easily to be understood. And I did not undertake that you would give him your answer at once—though he pleaded for it. Yes, I must admit that his manner—the sincerity of his manner—impressed me a little. I confess that. And I liked the way he talked about himself. There was a kind of blunt honesty about it that rather made you sympathise—as if with one who had been hardly treated by common rumour. Now I am not arguing on his behalf, Eelin; nor am I seeking to influence your decision—God forbid that I should do that!—but I think I ought to repeat to you some things he told me about himself, more especially as regards the future, and what he is willing to do, if you accept this position he offers you."

And therewith the poor woman, so pathetically resolved to be impartial—so determined that no hyper-sensitive feelings of her own should interfere with what many would consider her daughter's "chance in life"—began and fought against her own secret instincts and sympathies, and blinded her eyes to her fears, and would have nothing but commendation for Mountmahon's pledges of reform. He was to withdraw from the turf; he was to send his bodyguard of bullies to the right-about; he was to turn over a new leaf, and improve his conduct generally, and become an estimable member of society, if only Eelin would grant him her promise. And perhaps, in her over-conscientiousness, the Bean-an-Tighearn may have spoken as if she herself had been persuaded of all these things. The girl listened mutely, with absent eyes. Then a maidservant appeared at the door, to announce dinner; so that nothing more could be said at the moment.

And again at dinner the same unnatural calm prevailed—the mother dreading lest her specious representations had been too readily received, the daughter convincing herself, by the very earnestness of these representations, that her mother expected her consent. Neither looked the way of the other; whatever was said was uttered and answered in a mechanical sort of fashion; it was the strangest meal. As for Eelin, she sate for the most part silent, and with absorbed eyes, as if conscious of some impending doom.

But after dinner the girl made a desperate effort to break through this constraint; she went away to her own room and got hold of the box containing the coral and diamond necklace; and it was with quite a blithe air that she came into the drawing-room and marched up to her mother.

"Look here, Mummie," said she, "I have something to show you. There was no time before dinner: what I have in this box will want a good deal of examination and admiration. A present?—yes, indeed!—and something of a present—"

"From Lord Mountmahon," the mother said, quickly.

"Oh, mother, mother—why will you!" the girl cried—and all the happiness she had been summoning into her face vanished on the instant; and she went and flung herself on to the sofa, her face downward, as if in despair. "I did wish to forget—for a few moments—"

"Eelin, my darling!" the mother exclaimed, in the greatest trepidation—and of course she was hovering and nestling over her, with soft pettings and caressings. "Forget altogether! If that is what is troubling you, forget altogether!"

She rose, rather languidly.

"Come here, mother!"

The mother followed her, until both were opposite the engraved family-tree, with its proud display of names.

"How can I forget when that keeps calling to me?" the girl said, in a strange kind of way. "Look. Here are the coats of arms of some of the families that have intermarried with the Macdonalds and Macdonells. You see, there is a corner left. If a new plate were engraved, there would be room. The Savage and the Falcon—these are the armorial bearings of the Countess of Antrim—oh, good enough company—oh, yes, good enough company—if one were to covet a place—"

The elder woman glanced nervously at the girl, and caught her by the hand.

"Come away, Eelin! I don't think you are very well to-night: you must go to bed soon. Come and show me your present: why, you haven't told me yet who gave it to you!"

She suffered herself to be led back to the central table, and there, under the strong glare of the lamp, she opened the casket. There was a sudden blaze of splendour.

"Isn't it a pity," she said, "that Mr. Macdonald—old Mr. Allan Macdonald, you know, mother—will never see it? He can only have heard of its great beauty—he can only have had assurances about the quality of the stones—he can only imagine it—"

"So it is Mr. Allan Macdonald that has given you this magnificent necklace?" the mother said, wondering and examining and admiring. "But why?—why?—"

"He had been told of the balls next week," said Eelin, "and he guessed I might be going."

"It was easy to guess that," the mother said (who none the less had her own secret fears of a refusal at the last moment). "Of course you are going; here is an additional reason; and I will venture to say there will not be a more exquisite piece of jewellery worn on either of those two evenings. It is the gift of a prince! Happy Eelin!"

"Oh, yes, happy Eelin!" was the rejoinder. And then she plucked up her spirits somewhat—they were never for very long cast down. "Mother, you must help me. For I made such an exhibition of myself this afternoon. I made an awful fool of myself. For you know, the dear old gentleman rather sprang this on me: if there were some words leading up to it, I didn't quite catch them; and all of a sudden I found myself there, like a gaby of a milkmaid, not able even to say 'Thank you.' And he dared me to utter another word; and then, if I had tried to look pretty, and simper, it wouldn't have been any good, for the poor old man couldn't see; and there I was—feeling like nine different sorts of a born idiot. Then all at once it occurred to me, if I had only a little time, I could send him a message in Gaelic, that would give some kind of voice to what I felt; and he seemed rather to like that idea; and all the way home—only there was a little dog that made friends with me, and kept interfering all the way home—I was making up something that would perhaps tell him. Only, my Gaelic is so common; it's shepherd's Gaelic that I have picked up anyhow; but you, Mummie, you are familiar with the elegances, with the refined and beautiful Gaelic; and if you would help me, we might together send him a neat little note. I've got the rough English already," she went on. "Perhaps I'd better write that out now, and then we can consider the phrases."

She went and got a sheet of paper; and after a little cogitation she pencilled down the words:

My heart with gratitude is like the tide of the sea flowing towards you; but it cannot speak; only, if you go down to the shore you will find all the shells murmuring with what it has been trying to say.

"Old Allan Macdonald will be a pleased man, Eelin, to-morrow morning," her mother observed. "You have not lost your trick of saying pretty things. And now let us see if we can find some expressive Gaelic phrases."

It was a respite, at all events; and for the time being the proposal of marriage was happily put aside, while this small literary exercise was being proceeded with. And then, when that was finished, and when the casket was shut up again, Eelin said, quite cheerfully, to her mother—

"Mummie, I wish you would buy a second-hand safe

and keep it in your room: it's a shame having all your valuables and family relics lying in a lawyer's office in Edinburgh. Not that I am anxious about my beautiful necklace. Oh, no. Set a thief to catch a thief. I suppose you don't understand that this house is protected by the greatest robber and villain and jail-breaker in Scotland? You don't understand? You've never heard Maxwell on the doctrine of the transmotion of souls, then? Oh, I assure you it is most ingenious. According to him, souls go skelping about the universe, apart from their bodies—just as they do in sleep; and when a particular soul comes upon an unoccupied body, it can take possession; and there and then the man who has been annexed in this way becomes the other man. And whom do you think Maxwell is at present? Why, one David Haggart, who was hanged at Edinburgh years and years ago for murder; desperate criminal he was, famous all over the south of Scotland and the North of England; not a jail in the country could keep him in; and Maxwell with Haggart's soul inside him has persuaded Morag that it is a murderer who is talking to her when she brings in the vegetables of a morning——"

"I wish he'd mend the netting over the nectarines!" said Eelin's mother, sharply, "instead of taking up the time of the maids with his nonsense!"

"But don't you see, Mummie, how secure we are with such a notorious malefactor protecting us? Set a housebreaker to guard a house! And that's why I am not anxious about my lovely necklace—though I do mean to hide it away deep down in a special wee corner that I know of: all the same, Mummie, you might just as well buy a second-hand safe; it wouldn't cost more than £4 or £5; and you could get at your treasures whenever you wanted. And now I must go and see that Beelzebub has not been left in the pantry: I'm getting tired of earthquakes at three in the morning."

That night was a troubled night for the poor mother. Hour after hour she lay awake, fearing that she had said too much, or too little. Had not the impartiality she had striven for been after all a pusillanimous kind of thing? Ought she not to have spoken out her own acute and keen convictions freely? Ought she not to have said: 'Eelin, the impetuous and insensate fancy of this illiterate booby is

an insult! Come back from looking at that family tree! You may owe your ancestors much; but they do not ask for your personal degradation. It is a great position that is offered you, no doubt; many girls would be proud of it: you have other things to be proud of. And if the Marchioness of Mountmahon might become the benefactress of the scattered Macdonalds of Kinvaig, would they not one and all of them starve outright from hunger and bitter winds rather than see her bearing any such polluted name?'

That was one swing of the pendulum; then there was the other: the poor Bean-an-Tighearn—she of all people—striving to persuade herself that she was a woman of the world, intrepid, not too squeamish, who must have regard to her daughter's material interests, without trivial and over-sensitive qualms. But whichever way the pendulum swung, there was ever in the background a dim and agonising horoscope. For this girl lived all too strenuously, too vitally, too eagerly, whether in unbridled mischief and gaiety among her friends or in quick and active sympathy with the circumstances of the poor folk she knew. And if her own life were to be blundered somehow—if there were to be disappointment—if she were to be flung back wounded—then the anxious mother foresaw how the wild and passionate nature might dash itself against the rock of human mischance—and there an end. The hours of that night were long.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN ANSWER.

On this Monday morning there was a rare scene of hurry and confusion in the Exhibition-hall of the Highland Home Industries Association; for several consignments had been delayed on their route from the outer isles; and now at the last moment they had to be opened and measured and ticketed and catalogued; and among the busiest of the busy—and apparently delighting in the whirl and rush—was a handsome, fresh-complexioned, energetic young lass who wore in her Tam o' Shanter a sprig of the common heath, which is the badge of Clan Dhonuill, and who wore at her neck a silver brooch with 'The Eagle's Crag' engraved on it, that being the slogan of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig. She was calling to this one or that of the lazy boy-messengers; her mouth seemed full of pins and her hands of blue pencils and labels; and when she turned to her assistant—a young girl who had been hired from Struthers's shop—it was not to seek for help, but rather to offer it, in the sorting out of diced hose and similar articles. She appeared to be very happy amid all this bustle and pother; indeed activity of any sort was always a joy to this wild creature; and at length she saw cosmos triumphantly emerging from chaos; the very last of the labels had been affixed—and it was not yet ten minutes to eleven, the opening hour.

It was at this point that there appeared at the door a tall, fair-haired young man, who glanced rather diffidently up and down the spacious building. He seemed afraid to enter; and yet every one was too much occupied to attend to him; and so at last he found courage to advance a few yards and look round. Among all those ladies, and young

ladies, and giggling lassocks, was Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig the only one known to him ?—at least it was to her he made his way.

"Who let you in ?" said she, promptly, as she took the last of the pins out of her mouth. "We don't open till eleven."

"The power of the press," he answered her.

"Oh ; you have come to report ?"

"Hardly. There will be the official report. But I mean to write a general article on the whole week's proceedings."

"Then you are not a purchaser ?" she demanded again.

"I didn't come with that intention."

"In that case I fear you are of no use to me," she said—as she shoved straight some of the heavy webs of homespun that had got awry on the long counter.

"I might say a word in favour of the Association, while I am writing that article," he ventured to suggest.

"And so you might!" she said, cheerfully. "And so you might! Well, if you want to be bribed, come along in the afternoon, and I will give you some tea. Any time between three and five : that's when the quality show up, to talk to each other ; but they don't buy much ; the real buyers come early—to get their choice. So, au revoir!"

He raised his hat and was moving off when it suddenly struck him that the face of the young person behind the adjoining table was familiar to him. The table was in front of a portion of the wall between two windows ; so that the dusk had partially concealed her ; besides, what attention could Archie Gilchrist pay to any alien object when the wave-blue eyes of Eelin Macdonald were fixed upon him ? But now he seemed to know who this was : he went forward and stretched across his hand to take hers ; with a 'How do you do, Miss Forsyth ? I hope you are well!' ; and then again he raised his hat and went on. The young woman with the timid black eyes and the retiring manner appeared to be somewhat disconcerted by this recognition ; but just at this moment a purchaser—that great and noble creature, a purchaser—came up to inspect, and the incident passed by.

But Eelin had noticed, and as soon as the purchaser had gone away to the accountant's desk, she turned to her

assistant whom Lady Helmsdale—herself unable to appear—had engaged for the two days' sale.

"So you know Mr. Gilchrist?" said she.

"Oh, yes, Miss Macdonald," replied the quiet and rather nice-looking young woman with the dark eyes. "He was clerk in Mr. Struthers's shop; and I am sorry to say that I was the cause of his losing the place."

And therewith, seeing that Miss Macdonald was somewhat interested, she told her the story of Archie Gilchrist having interposed when the brute Struthers was fuming and hectoring; and she added, rather anxiously—

"And many's the time I have been wondering whether he was doing well."

"Better than ever he did in Struthers's shop!" said Miss Macdonald. "Why, he is a professional man now—with a great future before him!"

"Indeed, indeed! But we all of us used to think that of Mr. Gilchrist, so busy he was with his studies," said the young woman. "I'm sure I am glad. Many's the time my heart has been sore when I remembered it was through me he lost his place. And ever since, when my people out at Beauly have been sending me a dozen of new-laid eggs, or maybe a basket of green peas, or of apples and pears, I have taken them round to his cottage, and left them for him; and the old housekeeper there does not know my name, so she cannot tell him; only I wish him to understand there is someone who remembers a kindness——"

"And that is very nicely done of you, Miss Forsyth," said Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig (who was considerably the younger of the two). "Very nicely done of you indeed. And I don't see why you shouldn't continue to leave those little presents, merely because he is quite as well off as he was in Struthers's shop. One is always glad to know that one has a friend somewhere. And you may be sure I shall not betray your secret." The dark-eyed young woman seemed much comforted: she had not wrought him ill, then, after all?

The next customer was a notable one, being none other than old Allan Macdonald, who was piloted into the place by Angus, formerly water-bailiff. And Angus, as it turned out, was learned in the mysteries of domestic dyeing and weaving; and soon these two were discussing shades of

bealaidh, and *duileasg*, and *crotal*, and *crotal-nan-creag*, the one man lending eyes to the other, as it were; while Eelin, not having the proper instincts of a saleswoman, stood aghast at the recklessness of the old gentleman's expenditure.

"Mr. Macdonald," she protested, "what can you want with all that cloth!"

"Well, you see, Miss Eelin," he answered her, "when I go back to Ontario, there's many a one will be glad to have a bit of the real homespun, with the smell of the peat in it. And I do not often get such a chance; you are my warrant that the webs are genuine, and none of the Manchester imitations; and Angus here, he seems to know something. And if Somerled and I will be going to Loch Naver in the Spring, we will each of us be wanting plenty of rugs and wraps—yes, and an Inverness cape, too—for the salmon-trolling. What's that, Angus?"

"Ay, it's a grand piece, this one," Angus went on, turning over a new web. "It's a splendid piece, this one—smooth and firm and close: the wind will not get through it, and the rain will chist run off it."

"And the colour?" said the blind man.

"The colour?" said Angus, with a contemplative eye. "Well, I'm thinking it's about the colour of beech-leaves when they're first withered, and before the wet winter has reddened them."

"How many yards?"

"Feefty-four."

"I will take that piece, too, Miss Eelin, if you please," said the gallant purchaser, not staying to ask the price. And then master and man passed on, for there were ever and again fresh batches of arrivals, whose turn it was to inspect.

At the top of the stone stairway, on their way out, old Allan Macdonald stopped, hesitating.

"Angus," said he, in a low voice, and in Gaelic, "were you observing the other counters? Were you thinking that the other ladies were selling more than our young lady?"

"That I was not observing," answered Angus, in the same tongue, "but sure I am, sir, it's yourself was not leaving Miss Eelin many more pieces to sell. And I am thinking that was a fearful bill you had to pay at the desk."

"Now listen to me, Angus," said the great, white-bearded giant. "It is not seemly that a blind person should be going about pretending to examine webs of cloth; and so for the present we will return to the hotel. But this is what you must do in the afternoon, Angus; for you have the blessing of eyesight. You will come back here, and you will pass along the counters, and you will keep a sharp look-out, and you will discover whether the other ladies have been making more sales than our young lady. And if that is so, then you will come back quickly to me, Angus—do you understand me now? As fast as your legs can carry you, you will come back; and I will be ready with another bunch of notes; and we will set out at once. Because I am sure my son will be saying that I have not made half enough purchases—when it is Miss Eelin Macdonald who condescends to offer these things. Do you understand me, Angus? I will be waiting for you." And with that they left.

Altogether this was quite a gay morning for Wild Eelin; for among the people who came slowly circulating through the hall, inspecting, comparing, questioning, and buying or not buying, were innumerable friends and acquaintances, with whom she had to exchange a nod or a word of greeting; then she made a very fair disposal of her wares; and there was a certain satisfaction in being able to get through with her work in the absence of Lady Helmsdale, who ought to have been by her side. But in the afternoon, as the crowd increased, trade grew slack, and she had more time to look about her. And now it was that the rank and fashion of the north, who had come swarming into the Invernish hotels for the week's festivities, began to make their appearances; and as the payment of an extra shilling enabled a visitor to ascend into the gallery, where he or she could have tea and cake and a placid survey of the assemblage below, this was the retreat chosen by most of the newcomers. Some very well-known faces were visible behind that elevated rail, as Miss Eelin could espy. And she was having a little more leisure; indeed her gentle-mannered companion behind the table had insisted on handing over her chair, for the temporary loan of which she was abundantly grateful.

Then of a sudden her eyes quailed, and her heart began

to throb with alarm. She had been so happy amidst all this toil and turmoil that she had been able to forget; a certain answer that had been demanded of her had for the time being been thrust aside; here she was safe among many friends and neighbours, whose quick glances this way and that shewed the keen interest they were taking in each other. And yet she had been charmed into a false security; for there could be no mistake as to who this was who had just entered; and who now came forward to her, grinning, smiling, wearing his most captivating air. And so elegantly and elaborately dressed he was; Savile Row had done the best possible for his squat figure; the begonia in his button-hole was a flame-point of colour; while the after-luncheon flush that still pervaded his rotund and flabby and shining features lent him almost a look of health.

"Guessed I should find you here," said he, with a sort of chuckle of satisfaction. "Oh, yes, I heard that Lady Helmsdale would prove a non-starter—the sly old mother-fox!—as cunning as a cart-load o' monkeys—that's what they say about her anyway—putting the whole of the work on to your shoulders, and nailing all the 'Kudos' for herself when it comes to the newspapers."

"I thought you were at Kinvaig, Lord Mountmahon," said Eelin, driven desperately to answer him for the mere sake of appearances;—"that you were not coming up till Thursday."

"How could I stay away?" he asked; and his semi-bemused, blue-grey eyes regarded her with adoration and ecstacy, or were meant to do so. "Come, come, be fair, Miss Eelin—if I must still call you Miss Eelin. Make allowances for human nature. How could I stay away? What's telegrams? What's postcards? What's some measly old formal message, meaning nothing at all? I want to hear from yourself: and I guessed I should find you; and here I am, at the earliest possible minute—after a snack, don't you know—after a snack, to restore the inner man—"

He looked all round; went off on a foraging expedition, and presently returned carrying a chair, which he placed for himself so that there was no way of escape for her.

"Excuse importunateness," he said, with a bit of a laugh. "But, after all, human nature is human nature, and you

can't get over that. You didn't make yourself ; and you aint responsible ; and human nature is what it is, and there's no getting over it. Follow your first impulse, and you're doing the right and straight thing ; it's only the mugs who cut their feelings to bits and calculate chances. Fire ahead : that's my motto. You only live once ; and you've got to eat, or be eaten. It's every man for his own hand. And when I see a tremendous prize to be won, I'm not going to stick at trifles. And it isn't quite trifles, either, what I promised to your mother ; oh, no, it aint ; for of course you got all the messages, Miss Eelin, that your mother undertook to deliver—along with the all-important one ; and mind you I haven't forgotten an iota ; no, I haven't ; you can make me a reformed character to-morrow morning, if you like—by one little word. And as for gratitude and all the rest of it, you may trust me ; I'm not such a bad kind of chap to get on with— "

Now the confusion and embarrassment from which Eelin Macdonald was suffering was cruel enough—for she knew that, all along those galleries, here and there her friends would be looking down, and could not fail to observe the ogling glances and ingratiating grimaces of this too notorious young man ; but she did not entirely lose her self-possession.

"Lord Mountmahon," said she, with sufficient dignity, "surely this is neither the time nor the place for such talk. And I did mean to send you an answer—yes—if—if—you could really imagine it was necessary—after so slight and short an acquaintanceship—— "

"Which can so easily be mended!" he exclaimed, in quite a jocund way. "Nothing easier than that. Every day will help. Every mortal day that passes will help. All you've got to say is one wee, wee word ; and then we'll set to work to amend the short acquaintanceship. What's the use of hanging back, for form's sake. Can't you read people at a glance? I can—all I want to know of 'em ; and then if they're cantankerous beasts, or skinflints, or jugginses, or prigs, or molly-coddles, they may go to Hong Kong, and ten miles further, for me. I think you can generally tell what a fellow is like. Come, come, Miss Eelin ; I'm not driving you into a corner—— "

"But I think you are!" she said, with some warmth—if her eyes were fixed on the floor.

"Not at all—not at all!" he said, good-humouredly. "Only a little gentle pressure: so that I may carry away with me some inkling as to what is going to happen—to cheer my lonely absence, until I return on Thursday. I'm not a poetical gent, don't you know; but I could say something about those splendid eyes of yours, if this were a proper occasion——"

"It isn't, then!" she said, in downright anger; and she rose abruptly, and took the chair on which she had been sitting, and handed it back to Miss Forsyth, who had been discreetly non-observant all the while. Then Eelin crossed to the counter and stood there, by her piles of homespun.

And of course Mountmahon instantly followed.

"I know it isn't quite the best occasion," said he, "but human nature is human nature, and you can't get over that: and I wanted to take away with me some little assurance. Sorry if I've seemed rather importunate; but 'persistare' is a good motto, don't you know; and I'm in a bit of a fix at the moment, for my lads are in a brake outside, and they're apt to become a deuce of a noisy crew when they're kept waiting. But look here, my dear Eelin, if you won't say anything outright, if you're afraid of being overheard, what's the matter with this? A couple of words now——"

He had got hold of an unattached label and also of one of the blue pencils, and these he put into her hands.

"A couple of words now——"

Well, she hardly knew what she was doing, so exasperated was she and ashamed; or she may have had some wild fancy that if she humoured him in this matter he would at least go away; at all events she placed the blank label on the top of one of the webs, and with trembling fingers she wrote these words—

What you ask is in every way and for ever impossible.

He seized the piece of paper, looked at it, and professed to be highly delighted.

"Impossible? The very word I like! Suits me down to the ground! Why, it's the only thing worth trying for, the impossible: of course it is. Who but a silly-billy ever took no for an answer? Wish I had another ten minutes to convince you, Miss Eelin; but I must be off—or my boys will be tearing the streets to bits. Tell your mother I am coming out to see her the moment I return. Your mother's

on my side, you know; and *persistare* will conquer the impossible, never you fear!" And so, with nods and smiles and parting glances, he took himself away: leaving Eelin Macdonald half-maddened with resentment and indignation, as the circumspect Miss Forsyth could very well make out from the girl's burning cheeks, her trembling frame, her haughty lips, and sombre eyes. Alas! that there should have been other spectators of this incident not so favourably placed for accurate observation as Miss Forsyth.

"I say, Lil, did you see what was going on?" remarked one of two young people to the other as they were on their way out.

"It is not to be spoken of!" answered Lily Neile—who appeared to be distressed.

"But it will be spoken of," her brother continued. "By to-morrow it will be spoken of all over Invernish, and outside it too. Really, now," the tall, sandy-haired youth went on, "who could have expected such a thing, from Eelin Macdonald of all people! Well, of course, one never knew what she was going to be at next—any madcap trick—parachuting herself from the top of the Cathedral—anything—but not this—not this! How many weeks since his wife was drowned?"

"Don't speak of it, Alec!" his sister said.

"But I tell you every one will be speaking of it!" he insisted. "So open—so shameless—before all the crowd—writing little notes to him as if she were a flirtatious barmaid! And that is what she has come to—your beautiful Wild Eelin, that used to be the proudest of the proud! But it's wonderful what women will do, for a title."

Then she turned upon him; and the eyes of this ordinarily merry and debonair lass had an unwonted fire in them.

"I will not have you talk like that of Eelin Macdonald!" she said in vibrant undertones. "Do you hear me? You are judging by appearances. What right have you to judge by appearances? At all events, I am not going to jump to any conclusion until I learn a little more. Eelin is my friend; and if anyone has anything to say against her, it isn't to me they'd better come!"

The long-legged, fair, freckled Highland-looking youth only raised his eyebrows a little; he was a peaceable lad, and in no mood for a quarrel.

CHAPTER XXVI.

'HERE ALL EYES GAZE ON US.'

From earliest dawn the skirl of the pipes had been heard, along the country roads or through the outskirts of the town; as the day declared itself, an unusual activity everywhere prevailed; the dull grey thoroughfares had touches of colour here and there, in the various uniforms of regulars and volunteers; young fellows, in all the bravery of kilt and jacket and sporran, or in the quieter costume of knickerbockers and deerstalking cap, lounged about the porticoes of the hotels, thinking less of their morning cigarette than of the hoped-for favours at the dance that night; house-parties came driving in in waggonettes; and already stragglers were making away for the grounds in which the Athletic Sports and Competitions were to be held. It was a gala day for Invernish; and the heavens were propitious; a silver-clear sky showered floods of diamonds on the swinging and fretted current of the river; there was just enough wind to stir the bannerets hanging from the tall poles; and the sunlight was gradually and surely increasing in strength until even the slopes of the Black Isle, afar on the horizon, began to show a dusky yellow through the dim sea-mists.

And fain, fain would Eelin Macdonald have remained away from the famous Gathering—for reasons which she would hardly avow even to herself; but then this was about the sole occasion of the year on which her mother suffered herself to be drawn forth from her seclusion; and that because she could so easily renew old friendships when the representatives of the great families of the north—the Grants and Frasers, the gay Gordons and gallant Grahams, the Macleods and Mackenzies, the Rosses, Sinclairs, Ogilvies, Farquharsons, with all their kith and kin—came trooping

into the enclosure; and who more likely to receive an honoured welcome than the gentle Bean-an-Tighearn of Kinvaig, even though the glories of her house had gone? So Miss Eelin saw to it that her mother was dressed in her very smartest and neatest; and as for herself she had discarded her boyish Tam for headgear of a more young-ladyish kind; and when the hour had arrived, a cab was sent for, and they drove away to the scene of high revelry.

And here, just as their modest vehicle drew up, was Lady Helmsdale alighting from her barouche. She was a big woman, of imposing presence, hawk-faced, and capable-looking, with shrewd, observant grey eyes that had nevertheless a glint of humour in them at times.

"My dear Eelin," she cried, "I know you'll never forgive me; but I couldn't help it, indeed I could not help it; and I kept hoping to the very last: I tell you that clinical thermometer was hardly ever out of my mouth—and his lordship jeering at me—'There you go, Janet, sucking that glass cigarette of yours'—but the wretch of a thing wouldn't come down to less than 101—sometimes it was 101·4—and how could I risk leaving the house? Never mind: I'll make it up to you to-night, Eelin dear; indeed I will; I'll be the most patient of chaperons; to-morrow morning's daylight will find me at my post, if you wish it——"

But at this point she had to take her turn at the wicket-gate; and therewithal the three of them passed through, and went along an opening between two of the stands, until the brilliant spectacle burst full upon their view—the long semi-circle of wooden erections, with their tiers upon tiers of onlookers, the spacious breadth of greensward, the octagonal platform on which four kilted Highlanders were dancing a reel, their cairn-gorms and silver ornaments flashing in the sun. There was no crowding along these benches, nor anything like it; nevertheless Mrs. Macdonald of Kinvaig and her daughter experienced a little difficulty in getting to their seats, for they seemed to be known to many of the people walking about on the grass, and these, one after the other, would come up to greet them with friendly inquiries. One elderly chieftain, indeed, in full array of tartan and eagle's plume, made so bold as to ask Miss Eelin what dances she was going to give him at the ball that evening; and Miss Eelin dutifully replied that it would be

for himself to say if she brought him a blank programme. Eventually, however, they managed to make their way through these kindly folk, and then they ascended to their places, Lady Helmsdale accompanying them.

And truly it was a goodly display that now stretched away from them on each hand; for nowhere in all the world is there to be found such a concourse of handsome men and women as is brought together at this Northern Meeting at Invernish. Well-born, well-educated, trained from their earliest youth to every sort of athletic exercise and accomplishment, they form the very pick and flower of the English race; and perhaps it is permissible to speak of them as of the English race, for although their names may be Highland, and their Highland descent and traditions proudly and carefully cherished, it is probable that through intermarriage English blood predominates in at least a large minority of these families. Be that as it may; here they were: the young men in from the moors, and the hill-sides, and the corries, the young women from the salmon-rivers and the golf-links; with the light and glow of health in the clearness of their eyes and the freshness of their complexion; and with the grace of perfect physical condition in the movement of every limb. Of course, such an assemblage could not be strictly homogeneous; naturally there were a few aliens; for example, down there on the front bench was a beautiful Greek girl whose soft black eyes were regarding the reels and strathspeys with as concentrated an interest as if she were in the Stadion at Athens watching for the first runners coming in from Marathon's plain; Greek she was, in the splendour of her pale loveliness, though the people about her knew her as Lady Gordon of Grantly; and then again, just beyond her, there was a tall and most prepossessing American young person who had acquired the title of Lady Cameron of Inverfask, and who was now standing talking to the Chief of her husband's clan. But it cannot honestly be said that these or their like detracted much from the general appearance of the distinguished throng.

And this was the assemblage in front of which there now presented himself a thick-set young man of clean-shaven and shining countenance, who wore a light grey covert-coat and a billy-cock hat, and had a binocular glass slung over his shoulder. The newcomer did not seem to be much

abashed by those rows upon rows of spectators, whose attention, withdrawn for a moment from the performance of the Aldershot gymnastic team, might very probably fall upon himself; on the contrary, he sauntered along with an easy swagger, while his upward glance scrutinised tier after tier, obviously on the look-out for some one. And at last he found what he sought; he left the greensward; he ascended the wooden steps; he passed along an unoccupied bench, and the next minute he was gaily shaking hands with Mrs. Macdonald of Kinvaig and her daughter, and being introduced to Lady Helmsdale. Then the bunch of deep red roses he had brought with him: these he formally presented to Miss Eelin, whose cheeks were of about the same colour, and whose eyes certainly did not beam with responsive gratitude, for this was all too conspicuous a compliment, in so public a place. Nor did the horsey-looking young man seem inclined to go away, or even to take a seat; he remained standing in front of these ladies, so that he could address them all at once, in his airy and facetious and captivating fashion.

"You and I are to be friends to-night, Lady Helmsdale," said he, in his strident voice. "You know, I sympathise with chaperons. Awful hard luck on them. Out of it altogether. They can't be for ever eating buns and drinking stale claret-cup. But I'll tell you what, now; supposing, as soon as the daylight begins to show itself, you and I should sneak out, and toddle down to the river-side, and watch them haul in the salmon-nets at the Friar's Shot? What d'ye say to that, now? A new idea, eh? For that's what keeps one going—something fresh, something novel, something stirring; scoop in all the experiences possible, for this miserable life is the only one ready to hand; get what you can, and swing along; full speed ahead—that's my motto! And talking of speed, have you heard about my project for getting the two iron bulls to come careering against each other, up in the Drumouchter Forest?"

"The railway engines? Yes, I have heard something of it," replied Lady Helmsdale—and her calm and contented grey eyes seemed to read through and through the inchoate brain of this happy-go-lucky youth.

"Will you come?" he said eagerly. "Do! It'll be awfully jolly if you will! At first I thought of having our

own little party of three; but you'll be heartily welcome; and you'll just see whether I can manage things or not. You'll see. My years don't amount to threescore and ten as yet; but I've lived a goodish bit and made the most of my time; you'll see whether I can't bring that entertainment off in proper style. And there's another thing. I've been thinking. This is the idea, don't you understand. Two engines smashing into each other and knocking themselves to smithereens is all very well; but it ain't the real thing; I mean it isn't like the real thing—and I know that's what you'd like to behold, from your seats in the little stand. And I've been considering; I've been considering whether I couldn't get a lot of artists' lay-figures—the big wooden things, you know, that always look broken at the waist—with their arms stuck out as if they wanted to dance the polka; a lot of second-hand ones would do well enough, and be cheaper; and I could get them rigged out in toggery, all as large as life and twenty times as natural; and I could make a bargain for one or two old disused third-class carriages to tack on to the engines, and my wooden friends could be stuck into them; and then, when the almighty crash came, then you'd see the genuine thing—dislocated legs and arms flying through the air—crushed-up corpses among the upset wheels and the roaring steam. How's that now? Is that an idea? Is that something of a swagger idea? Miss Eelin, what d'ye say?"

"Horrible!" the girl answered, with an involuntary shudder. "I could not look on at such a thing!"

"Oh, but you'll be persuaded!" he said, familiarly—and he stepped over the intervening bench and took his place at her side. "You'll be persuaded," he continued, in pleading and confidential tones. "I'm sure you will. You see, I haven't the gift of the gab; I never kissed the Blarney stone; and when I want to please anybody, I've got to try to *do* something. And for a high old raree-show, I think this exploit up there in the Drumouchter Forest will be hard to beat: arms and legs a-wallopin', wallopin', and the two iron bulls roaring at each other with their steam. All to ourselves, too; no reporters; no pictures in the illustrated papers. Ah, but there's one picture I should like to see in the illustrated papers," he went on, sentimentally, in a still lower voice—and what could she do (though all her wild

and passionate soul was in revolt) but summon to her aid some outward show of resignation—her eyes averted from the crowd, as if that could prevent the crowd in turn regarding her and her companion, when a roving scrutiny of these raised benches filled up the gaps between the performances out there in the open? "Yes, that's the one picture I should like to see—best artists in London—I'd stump up for that, no fear—all guaranteed portraits—the bridal veil not quite hiding the beauty of the bride—distinguished friends in pews—everything trim and slap-up and proper—and the—the—the breath that breathed o'er Eden, don't you know."

"Lady Helmsdale," said Eelin, speaking across her mother, "I do hope they will take precautions about starting the bicycle races: there was a serious accident yesterday, when they were only practising."

But even this sufficient hint could not induce the stubborn young man to desist from his importunities and attentions. He wished to know at what hour she was likely to arrive at the ball; and wanted her to promise him all the barn-doors. He took the bunch of red roses, and smelt it caressingly, and returned it to her lap. He asked her which of the ladies' weekly papers she took in, and whether they announced engagements and forthcoming weddings. And so he held on, not heeding or not perceiving the indignant resentment conveyed by her silence; and meanwhile the various items in the programme were being got through, and the afternoon was wearing by.

Nevertheless, for some little time back, it had become apparent that Mountmahon had grown just a trifle anxious; for more than once he had taken his field-glass from its case and directed it towards a portion of the wide meadow to which the public were admitted at a small charge.

"Those rascals of mine," he said to Eelin, "are awkward customers when their backs are set up. I hope they'll get decent places. If they can't see what's going on they'll make their way to the front somehow; and if any one sets a finger on them, there'll be a scrimmage, and no error. Why, what's up now!" he exclaimed, with his binocular still levelled at the distant and nebulous mass of human beings, where, to all appearance, some little commotion had been aroused. "By Jove, they've got over the ropes!

And the police—if the police lay a hand on one of them——"

He hurriedly shut up his glass and replaced it in the case.

"Miss Eelin, I must be off, or there will be a universal riot! Don't forget the barn-doors; but I'll be there in time—oh, yes, I will—you don't catch this child napping, while there's fun to the front. Good-bye, Mrs. Macdonald—awfully sorry you're not coming to the dance to-night. Lady Helmsdale, au revoir—we shall be chums this evening, or I'm mistaken." He glanced again towards the crowd. "By Jingo," he observed, with unusual earnestness, "if I'm not round there in a jiffey, there'll be corpusses laid out on the green!" And therewith he hastened away.

"Oh, mother," said Eelin, with a sigh of inexpressible relief, "don't you think we should go now?"

"I should like it—if you don't mind," the mother said: she was looking tired, after the excitement of meeting with so many old friends.

"But, Mary," interposed Lady Helmsdale, in an undertone, "you really must let Eelin drive home with me. I shan't keep her half an hour; a cup of tea, and then she shall rejoin you. The dear child! Of course I had heard the rumours—but I didn't know what to think; and I must have a word with her—to wish her happiness."

The gentle Bean-an-Tighearn was too perturbed to protest; indeed, this was all too public a place for any remonstrance or explanation; and now the three ladies were descending to the greensward, continuing their way along to the entrance. Here Lady Helmsdale's carriage and Mrs. Macdonald's cab were called up; and when the latter had driven off, her ladyship, with much pride of possession, placed Eelin beside her in the barouche.

"My dear child!" she said, the moment they had started—and she had got hold of the girl's hand. "My heartiest congratulations! Of course I had heard—but seeing with one's eyes is better——"

"It is all a mistake, Lady Helmsdale!" Eelin cried, in great distress. "There is nothing between Lord Mountmahon and me, if that is what you mean——"

"Nothing?" exclaimed the elder lady. "And those roses—and the manner of presenting them."

Well, Eelin had brought the roses away with her as unthinkingly as she had brought away with her the programme of the day's sports; but now she snatched up the nosegay and flung it out of the carriage as though she had suddenly perceived among the petals the subtle eyes of a centipede.

"My dearest child, what does it all mean?" Lady Helmsdale cried again, and in almost a frightened way. "His attentions were so obvious—and intended to be obvious—everybody would assume—you may be certain every one will assume what seemed to me so apparent. And then at the ball to-night—he is clearly bent on claiming you for his own——"

"Oh, dear Lady Helmsdale," said the girl, in an agony of entreaty, "couldn't you find me some plan for letting me stay away? I don't want to go to the ball!—indeed I do not!—a hundred thousand times I would rather stay away! Couldn't you find some excuse!"

"I could find some excuse," observed Lady Helmsdale, slowly, "for my not being able to take you—an excuse at the last moment. And I know your mother wouldn't think of bringing you herself; and as for anybody else at that late hour——"

"Oh, dear Lady Helmsdale, will you do that for me!" Eelin cried. "I shall be so grateful! I shall be so grateful! And as for my mother—well, I don't know what she expects of me; but—but—she cannot be angry if I stay away! Dear Lady Helmsdale, can you find an excuse?"

"Indeed I think I can," replied the shrewd-eyed dame, after a second or so. "But I fear I am venturing into a dangerous ploy. And I confess to you, my dear Eelin, that I had looked forward to your carrying everything before you to-night; and maybe I hoped to be thought something of myself—borrowing a little from your splendour, you know. Your black hair, your fine colour, I can see how impressive they would be in white, to say nothing of the wonderful necklace I've heard so much of. But a girl does not like to be talked about—I understand—I understand; and you especially, that have always been so proud and independent. What your mother will say to me, if she should come to suspect, I need not think of just now. Mary St. Aubyn used to be my oldest and closest friend; but it's Mary St. Aubyn's daughter has the first claim on

me at this moment; and, if you're sweirt to go to that ball, my dear, then it's not to that ball you're going—or my name's not Janet Helmsdale!"

By this time they were arrived at Sutherland Lodge, and when Lady Helmsdale had carried Eelin off to her own room, the first thing she did was to show her guest how, by placing a clinical thermometer in sufficiently warm water, the temperature recorded in the instrument may be raised to 102·6.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WILD PLUNGE.

THE moonlight night was gradually and silently unfolding itself like a flower; and something like the perfume of a flower came stealing in from the ghostly grey meadows and from the clumps of alder down by the stream. On the terraced portion of the tennis-lawn, under the wide-branching trees, Eelin was slowly pacing up and down, listening. In the perfect stillness sounds seemed to come from great distances; and amidst the vague murmur that told of the town, she thought she could detect the hushed, remote, continuous rattle of carriages driving up to the Assembly-rooms. Of course that was but a fancy: and it was a fancy that left no envious sting behind it; she was well content to be where she was—free from apprehension—her own mistress—with all the witchery of this solitude around her. Lady Helmsdale's little scheme had worked admirably. At the last moment she had sent a note to her dearest Mary, saying she was in despair; not for worlds would she have disappointed Eelin, but here, before her eyes, was her clinical thermometer registering 102·8; it would be madness to venture out; who, then, could be found as a substitute to take the dear child under her wing? And at first the Bean-an-Tighearn's imagination went frantically seeking for some such substitute, and she would have sent off the servants to this one or that among her friends; until Eelin had demonstrated the futility of these efforts, and assured her mother that she would infinitely prefer to be left alone. Indeed the poor woman did not make much of a struggle; the fatigues of the day had given her a sick headache of a desperate character; and eventually she was persuaded to betake herself to bed.

And thus it was that Eelin came to be walking all by herself on the terrace above the mysteriously-moving river; and far away was the dull golden glow shed by the lamps of the town: and out here above the dim grey fields and the darker woods the white moonlight increased in its soft radiance and there was a glory over the land. Then, from the other side of the wide current, came the voices of some young men and maidens who were most likely going in to have a look at the festivities; and presently their laughing and talking gave place to musical notes, for one of them had begun *A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry*, and very well they sang. Nay, Miss Eelin, attracted by the measured cadence that came faintly across the water, herself joined in—in a low alto that could not have been heard half-a-dozen yards from where she stood—though she used the version Lily Neile and she were accustomed to sing together:

A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry,
For we are going to Altnaherry.

The next moment a wild project sprang into her head. Were these lads and lasses really going in to Union-street, to watch the arrival of the illustrious chiefs and chieftains, and their still more resplendent wives and daughters? And could not she also, with a sufficient disguise, join in the crowd to become an unobserved onlooker, recognising one after another as each successive carriage drove up? Would she be in time to see how Lily Neile was looking, and how her dress became her? Surely a tartan shawl over her head and shoulders, and brought well round her face, would enable her to avoid detection? It would be an adventure, anyway; and she might pick up some of the *voces populi*, for the subsequent amusement of her girl-companions.

Now the tartan of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig consists mainly of deep purples, blues, and greens, so that this was a very sombre figure that presently went away along the banks of the silver-trembling Nish. And in process of time the moonlit world was exchanged for the world of gas; though, to be sure, when she had crossed the Suspension-bridge, and entered the main thoroughfare there, she was nearly on the point of abandoning her undertaking. For the whole town was in an uproar; arm-linked youths lolled along the pavements, vainly endeavouring to sing choruses

in tune; pipers skirled at random, regardless of audiences, in any convenient corner of lane or alley; now and again the convergence of the mob threatened to block the way; but all the same the slow string of cabs and carriages crawled onward, depositing party after party at the glowing entrance to the Assembly-rooms. And although Miss Eelin had never before been in the streets of Invernish on such an occasion and at such an hour; and although the rough-and-ready conduct of her neighbours from time to time rather frightened her, still she was by nature tenacious of purpose; she kept edging herself along; courteously yielding one second, gently insinuating herself the next; until at last she had obtained a position from which she could very well survey the drawing-up of the carriages, and the stepping-out of the gay throng, and their crossing the strip of red baize that led to the brilliantly-lit doorway.

And within the safe concealment of this voluminous shawl she found herself very merry and light-hearted; she laughed to herself to think that now she could spy upon her various friends and acquaintances, and criticise their appearance and expression and costume, without herself being subjected to any similar ordeal; it seemed to her that she had all the fun of the fair without any of its serious entanglements. Unhappily she appeared to have missed Lily Neile; perhaps that young lady had come early, to have her pick of partners; but here were plenty of others whom she knew, descending one by one to cross the pavement, and forming very pretty groups in the hall-way, their pale-hued attire appearing all the more effective because of the rich background of military uniforms and full Highland costume. And did no sense of injury, no jealous grudging, stir within the bosom of this hooded spectator? Not one bit. She hoped all the girls would find excellent dancers; she knew that the chaperons would prove considerate; she trusted there were bowers and alcoves for the sitters-out; she wished the whole company of them happiness and delight, and (the girls especially) the consciousness of looking their best. For 'nowhere beats the heart so kindly as beneath the tartan plaid'; and sure enough this was a Highland shawl that wrapped her round.

Her friendly reveries were rudely interrupted. There stepped forth from a cab two young men—both of them in ordinary evening dress—one of whom she recognised only

too easily. Burly and beaming and shining and polished he was, laughing and joking loudly with his companion, his clean-shaven, pot-boy face showing a rollicking good humour. Mountmahon did not see her—indeed, could not see her; but all the same, and with an indescribable loathing, she started back to get away; and in doing so touched the foot of some one immediately behind her. Instantly she turned to apologise.

"I beg your pardon!—I'm sure I beg your pardon!" she said—and at the same moment she found that Archie Gilchrist was looking down upon her, and staring at her, in profound amazement. He was not to be deceived by any close-drawn head-covering: he had seen her eyes—he had heard her voice: the eyes and the voice of the woman he loved: it was not likely that he could be deceived.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Gilchrist?" she said, in rather an incoherent fashion. "I—I wanted to see one or two of them pass in. But now I'm off home. Good-night!"

"You must let me see you through the crowd," he said—though he had clearly not got over his astonishment at finding her in such a place and in such a guise. "The other side of the street will be better." And with that, and slightly preceding her, he piloted her across to the opposite pavement, where there were fewer passers-by: the straggling populace of Invernish had concentrated itself round the entrance to the rooms.

"But," she said to him presently, "are you not going to the ball?"

"Oh, no," he answered her.

"I thought you meant to write an article on all the amusements of the week?"

"Yes, and so I may," he said, "from the point of view of an outsider. But I could not go to the ball. I dared not risk the chance of seeing you dancing with the man who crossed the pavement when you turned away just now."

"You mean Lord Mountmahon," she said calmly. "Well, yes, if I had gone, I suppose I must have danced with him."

"And the devil himself never invented a more ghastly profanation!" he said, with an intensity of feeling that startled her. She did not look up, to gather the expression of his face. And as she remained silent he went on: "I

had witnessed enough to-day. I saw him at the Games. I was there, within the enclosure. I saw him paying court to you—before all the known families in the Highlands. I saw him give you flowers—a man like that! And perhaps—perhaps I heard something of the common talk; anyway, I could not stay; nor did I venture to go near that ball-room to-night, except as a reporter watching the arrivals. There are some things that provoke only indignation and pity—and indignation and pity that are of no avail; and it is better to keep away."

Well, it was no part of her duty to defend herself against any accusation, however obscurely implied, brought forward by this young man. He was not much more than an acquaintance; interesting in himself, no doubt, and still more interesting with regard to his literary schemes and dreams and aspirations; yet hardly so intimate with her as to entitle him to assume the position of monitor and judge. Nevertheless, there was a ring of sincerity in his voice; and his manner was not presumptuous, but quite the reverse of that; and thus it was that Wild Eelin, instead of hotly resenting his interference, found herself meekly replying:

"If I were you, Mr. Gilchrist, I think I would not pay so much attention to what people say. As for the bunch of roses, well, refusing them would probably have attracted more notice than accepting them; and indeed I thought so little about them, one way or the other, that as soon as we got outside I threw them into the street. Then about this ball, and my dancing with Lord Mountmahon, or sitting out dances with him: suppose for a moment that I remained away for the very purpose of avoiding any such possibility? Why otherwise should I be here, walking homeward, with a shawl round my head?"

He could not find words to express his remorse and self-reproach.

"Will you ever forgive me?" he pleaded. "I had no right to say what I did, even if the worst were true. It was not my place. Only—only—there is this. It may not be much of an excuse; but there is this: that when one has found—even with a great distance separating—when one has found one's ideal of all that is beautiful and honourable and pure and sweet in womanhood, then—then one dreads the approach of anything likely to contaminate it. And so

there may be causeless apprehensions and fears; yes, and there may be presumption too. But if you will forgive me this time, I will not presume again."

He had so humbled himself that she was sorry for him; and she went out of her way to be kind to him; and would lead the talk towards his immediate occupations and affairs, and to the volume on Tannahill and Hector Macneill that he and she were to bring out together. By this time they had got away from the dinsome town and were out in the moonlit solitudes; but there was no suggestion on the part of either that he should relinquish his charge of her: they continued their leisurely walk by the white-glinting stream. Not that they were the sole occupants of this phantom world. Far on the other side of the river a drunk soldier was seated on the bank, most mournfully singing 'My Nannie's awa'.' He was not a ferocious warrior, but a peaceful; his plaintive ditty meant no harm to any one; he was merely commiserating himself on the absence of Nannie. Two difficulties he had to contend with: the one was a recalcitrant memory, so that every now and again he would stop altogether and hark back; the other was the presence of grace-notes at the beginning of the repetition of each last line.

'They mind me o' Nannie, but Nannie's awa'—The . . . . y mind me o' Nannie, but Nannie's awa'.' It was the second *The . . y* that bothered him so fearfully; but he was a conscientious performer; he would attack those preliminary flourishes, and wrestle with them, and heroically strive to overcome them; until he appeared to get sick-tired of the whole affair; he stretched out his legs on the bank, and turned over on his side, and no doubt was immediately fast asleep.

And meanwhile around the two wanderers the enchanted world had grown hushed and still—as silent as their ebony-black shadows on the silver-grey road; so that every tone, and modulation, perhaps even an occasional tremour, of their speech could be heard by each of them, for recalling and remembrance. And Archie Gilchrist was in a confidential mood—into which she had led him unawares: in particular he was telling her of the joy and pride with which his mother, the poor old woman up in Dingwall, had beheld his first appearances in the columns of a newspaper; and

how convinced, how bravely convinced, she was of his ultimate success; and how she would be more than ever confirmed in her prognostications if once he could show her his name on the title-page of an actual, tangible, printed book. Of the perfect and beautiful devotion of these two, mother and son, to each other, there could be no doubt in the mind of any one who listened to these recollections; and Eelin liked to hear him talk in this way—it was so human, and tender, and true; she felt that she was drawn closer and closer to him in sympathy; she followed these confessions with little gratified expressions of assent; hers was a nature to understand this man and his humble surroundings and his hopes, and she paid him the tribute of something more than respect.

Then he was emboldened to reveal to her his great immediate ambition, which was nothing less than this—that the old woman in Dingwall should come for a day to Invernish for the purpose of being introduced to Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig—that her eyes might behold her for a moment or two, and perhaps a few words be exchanged; whereupon the girl, in the audacious frankness of her generosity, immediately exclaimed—

"No, indeed! Why should she be put to the trouble of travelling? I will go through to Dingwall and call on her!"

"That would hardly do," he said hurriedly. "If you were to be so kind as that, she—she might make a mistake. She is a great reader; she lives a good deal in the world of romance; and she might think that wild and impossible things were going to happen——"

"What things?" she asked.

He had need of all his self-control; the cry of his heart was very near to his lips.

"Impossible things," he said, curtly. "No. Some day I will go through to Dingwall, and bring back my mother with me; because—because I wish her to see you for even a minute. That day will record my high-water mark: thereafter——"

"Yes?"

"Thereafter the old mother will go home again to Dingwall, where the few people she knows live. And as for myself, I shall resume my solitary work, giving up—but

surely not without gratitude—associations and friendships I am not entitled to——"

"And why solitary work?" she asked again. "Is that good for you—or for anybody?"

"Perhaps not," he said, absently. "Solitariness is apt to chill one's sanguine enthusiasms. Being alone is a disheartening kind of thing; one's faith in one's self is so apt to give way. It isn't thinking of the 'mighty poets in their misery dead'; it's thinking of the millions of competitors who are alive, and blocking every avenue. Never mind, success isn't everything. My fight through the world may be long, and dreary, and a failure; but it need not be ignoble. My pen shall not be a venal one. I will never debase my calling. And there is nothing dishonourable in poverty—if that is to be the end——"

"But why should you talk in that way?" she answered him, gently. "And why should you voluntarily give up friendships that you yourself appear to value? Do you think that it is only the proud old lady in Dingwall who looks forward to a great future for her son? There may be others who believe in you; who know what you will do; and who are only too willing to offer you comradeship and good-fellowship and sympathy and help. And why should you refuse?—why should you turn away?——"

Then the delirium of the moonlight night leapt to his brain.

"Eelin," he said, "in that future, whatever it may have in store, will you be at my side? Eelin, will you be my wife?"

And who can tell what sudden 'impulses of soul and sense' may not at this same moment have swept away her reason from her? She turned her eyes full on him; she extended both hands; she said, with a fine courage—

"Yes, I will!—I will!"

And then he would have drawn her towards him to kiss her as a sign and sealing of the compact; but she shrank away from him; and got free.

"Oh, no—not *that!*" she said, in mingled alarm and distress. "I—I will explain—I will write and explain. Good-night!"

For by this time they had reached the gate of Glengarva House.

"But I have your promise!" he said, breathlessly.

"Oh, yes, yes, you have my promise," she answered him, as she opened the gate, and again and noiselessly bade him farewell.

Morag the Mull lass was in the hall, sitting up for her young mistress.

"Oh, Miss Eelin," she said, in great concern, "what for have you stayed so late in the garden? There are fearful beings about—and they are the most treacherous when the moon is clear——"

"Toots, blethers!" said Miss Eelin, in goodnatured scorn. "Lock the door, and put out the lights, and get to bed."

As for her she went upstairs to her room in rather a gay and gallant mood. She had not in the least realised as yet what she had done.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ENGAGED LOVERS.

At each end of Eelin's dressing-table there was a lighted candle; between these was placed her writing-desk; and now in the early hours of the morning she was laboriously trying to compose a letter. But on this occasion the ready pen and readier wit of 'White Cockade' had forsaken her; she had made many efforts, and as many failures; and these had not been torn up and thrown into the waste-paper basket—they had been carefully put aside for some safer form of destruction. After all, it is not an easy thing for a proud-spirited and sensitive young woman to explain to the man she has just promised to marry that she would rather be safeguarded from endearments and demonstrations of affection; somehow the phrases would not come right; they were cold, unsympathetic, unmannerly, unmaidenly. The tragic humour of the situation was that she should consider it necessary to write in this strain to Archie Gilchrist of all persons in the world. It is true that when she promised to be his wife he had offered to kiss her, as was but natural in the circumstances; but the slight involuntary gesture with which she had shrunk back was for him as a wall of iron between them. Did she fear his insisting on his rights of possession? Then it was little she knew of the man to whom she had pledged her life.

And at last she abandoned the hopeless task; she threw herself back in the cushioned chair; and stared blankly before her, at the twin blinds of the partitioned window. At first she did not notice any change; her eyes had grown accustomed to the yellow glare thrown upward by the candles, and to the dull reflection of it opaquely returned by those vertical lengths of linen; but of a sudden it occurred

to her that this opacity had partly disappeared and that a certain transparency had taken its place. The blinds were no longer yellow, but more nearly their natural colour of bluish-white. And then she understood. If the new day was not yet here, at least there were indications of its approach; and so she got up, and extinguished the candles, and went into the little windowed recess from which she could look out on the awakening world.

But not yet awakened. Sleep hushed and profound dwelt over the hanging woods; the cold, steel-grey surface of the stream was undisturbed by any breath of morning air; not a leaf stirred; the night still seemed to claim its own. Nevertheless above the foliaged heights across the river—those brooding heights that had become a bank of solid, dark, rich olive-green—were premonitions of the wonders of the dawn: here and there a touch of ineffable rose—a transparent swathe of faintest saffron—a mystic glow that came stealing into the heavens, waxing warmer and clearer minute by minute. Were they still at their dancing in yonder town? Or was it not time for the last of the carriages to be summoned, lest maidens' cheeks should look pale in confronting the splendour now mounting into the skies?

But was the world indeed so empty? It appeared to her that for the briefest second her absently-gazing eyes had caught sight of a figure crossing an open glade in the bushes opposite the distant weir. And if this were not a ghost—if this were an actual human being—very well she knew who it must be. Who but a demented poet would be haunting the Islands at such an hour? And then she looked at the pile of unfinished letters, suggestive of an impossible endeavour; and she thought the explanation would be ever so much easier if she could see him face-to-face; and if there were any chance of meeting him, what more auspicious moment than the present, when there would be no passers-by to intrude? It was a prospect that at once filled her with a sense of joyous deliverance. She forthwith locked up the discarded correspondence, to be dealt with by-and-bye; she finished her dressing—but carefully enough; and then she got away down-stairs and out of doors. If she were to be missed, no one would express much surprise: the household were familiar with Wild Eelin's ways.

By this time the dawn had declared itself right royally: the zenith was a wonder and glory of lustrous orange cloud, with interstices of deep purple; and so all-pervading was the flame that the smoother breadths of the current, no longer of a cold steel-grey, had caught a warm bronze hue, under the soft green of the rowans and alders. As she passed through the wicket, and followed the pathway leading between the fields and the shingly banks of the stream, she noticed that the mists were slowly drawing up the hillsides; but the darker mountains in the south did not seem as yet to have emerged from the night.

At first she walked quickly; but when she came to the well of sweet water, and turned to cross the first of the small bridges, she knew that now she must intercept the stranger, whoever he might be, if he were anywhere about these Islands. And so (with affected carelessness of observation) she wandered along the winding avenues, under the branches of beech and lime and elm; and now and again she got a glimpse of her own home, far away on the other side of the river, with no sign of life about it yet. Next she came upon Archie Gilchrist. He was seated on a wooden bench, with two or three books by him, an open one on his knee, and a pencil in his hand. When the slight sound of her footsteps caused him to look up, he was as one paralysed, and he grew very pale.

"Oh, no," she said, smiling, in reply to his affrighted stare—only, as she advanced towards him, she was as rose-red as he was white—"I am myself. I am not a spectre. Do you ever see spectres—spectres of me, I mean—when you come about the Islands at these unholy hours?—for I hope I don't 'walk' in that way——"

The small gloved hand she gave him was certainly not the hand of a phantom; but he was still startled.

"I did not see you come along the other side," he said. "And—and—I was thinking of you—and for a moment I imagined my eyes had conjured up a spirit—I have heard of such things——"

He had gathered his books together, and she seemed to assume that he would accompany her, as she turned back on the way she came.

"I wished to see you," she said—and he was walking with her now—"I have been trying to write to you; but

I could not explain in that way. And of course there must be explanations and apologies. If the engagement we jumped into or fell into last night is to remain——"

"If it is to remain?" he repeated—but without reproach: it was for her to say whether it should remain or not.

"Then I've got to apologise for my upbringing," she continued, "and you'll have to take me for what I am—a pretty bad lot. You see, my mother is a very fastidious woman; and perhaps she has taught me a little too much personal pride—a sort of dislike for molly-coddling—perhaps even a disdain—that one is sorry for, you know—but there it is—an imperfection, that one must apologise for—and it might wear off in time, who can tell? For don't fancy I'm a prude! Oh, no, I'm not; I'm not a sniffer; I like fun—and lots of it; only—only——"

"And you think I cannot understand?" he said to her gently. And somehow she knew that he did understand—and she was greatly comforted.

All the same—and still with conscious colour in her cheek, and with downcast eyes—she continued to make little stammering excuses for her independence, her maiden reserve, and shyness—as if any such were necessary to this man, whose attitude towards her was all of mute worship, and deference, and obedience, and surrender of self; and by this time they had strayed from the usual walks and had come to the upper end of the middle island, which here narrows itself to a point, cleaving the wide current in twain. Here also, facing the open stretch of landscape, is a wooden seat plentifully adorned with carved initials; and so happy did Eelin feel at having got over her pleas and extenuations and established herself on a frank and free and safe footing with him that she suggested they should sit down for a little further talk, and he was nothing loth. Loth? It was a kind of maddening intoxication to be so near her; why, as they sate there, her skirts very nearly touched his foot; under the soft folds of her silken blouse he could see the quiet rise and fall of her breathing: when she laughed it sounded so close that it almost seemed himself laughing, so quickly responsive was his sympathy to her every mood. And she was trying to be very kind towards him. She felt secure with him. She was grateful that he had

so promptly dispelled all her embarrassment. And he listened, and could have gone on listening; for the mere thrill and delight of her presence—those two alone together in this great, brilliant world of sky and mountain and hanging foliage and rushing water—the mere physical thrill and delight in the consciousness of her presence was enough. But at last he said—

"Why, Eelin, you don't in the least seem to understand the magnitude of the sacrifice you are making! Yes; and it isn't as if you were drawn to it by any compelling affection or craving for affection—for I cannot believe that—I don't blind myself; it appears to me you are rather giving yourself away out of a generous goodheartedness—out of *bonne camaraderie*——"

"Ah, but you don't know," said she, smiling again. "By what sin fell the angels? Suppose I imagine myself to be a judge of character; and suppose I think I foresee a great future for some one; and suppose I am ambitious enough to wish to share it—what then? And you think you on your side are surrendering nothing? Ah, but you are," she went on—and so musical was her voice and so winning her air and expression and the varying charm of her manner that he found it difficult to follow her argument, if there was an argument: he was ready to agree to anything. "But you are," she said. "You are giving up 'A man's a man for a' that.'"

He was bound to protest—but it was in no energetic way.

"Oh, yes," she insisted. "You admitted that the great Declaration of Swagger didn't apply to one half of the human race; then if it does not apply to one half of the human race, it cannot apply to the other. Do you see? Are you convinced? For that's what they call logic."

She was as one gone daft; and in this idle and good-humoured fashion she rambled on, hardly waiting for any reply to her demure and inconsequent playfulness. Was it to put him at his ease—to reassure him—to cause this association and sympathy she offered him as the basis of their relationship to appear a simple and natural thing? The situation was altogether extraordinary; yet she seemed happy and well-content; he had not even put his hand within her arm, as brother and sister are wont to do.

Then into the heaven of his bliss leapt a lover's easily-excited alarms. He began to wonder whether she had divined his strong and deep and unconquerable love for her, and recognised its inevitable hopelessness, and in some wild freak of compunction had offered herself to him in this unfettered way as a kind of atonement. He already knew that there was no limit to the impulsive and unselfish generosities of this brave lass. But if that were all the response she could make to the passionate yearning of his soul, what hope would there be for their married life? L'un qui aime, et l' autre qui se laisse aimer: it may be an admirable arrangement for a time—perhaps even with an attractive touch of pathos about it; but how long is it likely to endure?

No, there was no cuddling and fondling between these engaged lovers, even in this propitious solitude and silence. She was advancing the proposition—and her eyes were perfectly grave—that in every meteorological office throughout the country there ought to be established a large salt-water tank containing a live salmon; for what more infallible prognosticator could there be of a change in the weather? But alas! the mere mention of the salmon recalled to her that old Fergus would now be at work on the opposite bank; and that it behoved her to get away home, before any one else should question her. Her companion was for going that way also.

"It would hardly be discreet—would it?" she said. "Old Fergus might wonder—mightn't he?"

And so they walked back to the parting of their routes—his that was to take him straight into the town, hers that was to take her across the small bridges to the other side; and at this point, and with a light and buoyant step, she left him. Was it the pale huntress, then, whom he had encountered in these woodland wiles, in the mystic regions of the dawn? But not any one of the Greek goddesses, however chaste and fair and radiant, had the mantling colour of this Highland girl—no, nor her all-conquering eyes—nor her merry and derisive tongue—nor her swinging, boyish stride that was carrying her so rapidly away from him. Then the rowan-bushes, and the willows, and the alders hid her from his sight; and perhaps he came back to his senses; and perhaps he did not.

As he walked away into the town, lines and phrases and fragments from 'Maud' were singing themselves through his brain—'Queen Maud in all her splendour'—'O Maud were sure of Heaven, if lowliness could save her'—and the like; and he was arguing with himself, and trying to prove to himself, that there could be no possible likeness between scent and sound: nevertheless when he was summoning up again to himself the rich, soft notes of Wild Eelin's voice—whether she was meekly assenting, or whether she was openly mocking at him, or whether she was lending him some of her own high courage in contemplating the future—these low and half-hushed tones of hers somehow and strangely seemed to recall to him the perfume of sweet-brier, just as the rain is ceasing, and when the sunlight is coming again into the warm summer air.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BRÜNHILDE.

"Top o' the morning to you, Fergus!" she called to him, above the din of the weir. "Why don't you howk him out?"

"I canna stir him," was the answer that came back from the fisherman, who was wading deep, and throwing a beautiful line.

"It's because you don't fish properly!" she continued, jeering at him. "Man alive, do you call that fishing! Why don't you haul a yard of slack under the reel—and shake out the line with the point of the rod—and give the fly a chance of working? Don't follow the fly round! dear, dear, that I should have to come round to give you lessons!"

He turned to her.

"Ay, and what mischief will ye be after this morning?" he asked of her, with the familiarity of an old crony.

"Oh, Fergus," she said, in a burst of candour, "I would cut off my head and lay it at your feet if you could only teach me to throw a line like that!"

"There's not a leddy in the north of Scotland will throw a better line than yourself, Miss Eelin," said he—with another of the long Spey casts going whistling out.

"Oh—oh!" she cried. "And you know what you told General Mallock about Lily Neile!"

"I did not! I did not!" he maintained, stubbornly. "I said she would keep longer at it, maybe. You're too impatient; and that's all the fault I've to find with ye."

"Well, I wish you good luck!" she called to him; and then as she went on again she said to herself: "And you might wish me good luck in return, Fergus, for I've much

need of it." Not that she was in any way dejected about the future; she was quite the reverse of that. She had secured safety for herself—even physical safety, for had she not seen the same Archie Gilchrist take up the leg of a cane-bottomed chair and belabour a whole rabble of roughs into ignominious flight? Moreover, it was a kind of alliance that left her so entirely untrammelled. Brünhilde the warrior-maiden could not have been left more entirely her own mistress. And for the rest such sinister phrases as 'I generally get what I want, don't you know' seemed to have less significance now: Nay, could they not be altogether dismissed and forgotten?

Indeed as she walked along this pathway between the beds of pink-grey shingle and the running river on the one hand and on the other the wide fields and the far shining uplands, one might have guessed her to be 'fey.' Light-headed she appeared to be as well as light-hearted; for with an immeasurable pathos she was reciting to herself—

'I wish I were where Eelin lies;
Night and day on me she cries;
O that I were where Eelin lies
On fair Kirkconnell lee.'

And then it was (the empty brain careering about anywhere)

'Hard fate that I should banished be,
And rebel called with scorn,
For serving of the kindest prince
That ever yet was born.

O my king—God save my king!—
Whatever me befall!
I would not be in Huntly's case,
For honours, lands, and all.'

And then again it was—while the oxen in the meadow were staring at her with their great, soft, inquiring eyes—

'But let them say, or let them dae,
It's a' ane to me;
For he's low doon, he's in the broom
That's waiting for me:
Waiting for me, my love,
He's waiting for me;
For he's low doon, he's in the broom
That's waiting for me.'

Only, when she drew near the house, she had to put a curb on her rodomontade: for she perceived that the blinds of her mother's bed-room were still lowered; and what her scattered wits had now to concentrate themselves upon was the question of arranging the most seductive breakfast she could frame for the poor invalid: hot and strong tea, to begin with; then a fried egg, with the yolk thin and hard, and yet not altogether hard, and just touched with cayenne; the white of the egg crisp and brown and alluring, with a sprinkling of grey pepper; the garniture some sprays of water-cress steeped in vinegar. Then there was a particular kind of phlox, the extremely delicate scent of which her mother was fond of; and she thought she would go on into the garden to gather a few bunches; so that when she went into the sick-room she would be carrying with her a breath of the sweet outside air.

But she had not gone past the laurel-bushes when she suddenly drew up; she heard voices, and through the leaves she could see that Morag had brought out a row of boots and shoes to polish here in the open, while old Maxwell, having delivered his consignment of garden-produce, was engaging her in conversation. And Miss Eelin wondered whether the Mull lass would remember the instructions she had received.

"Ay, and wha ur ye this mornin?" Maxwell asked of her, in his Lowland tongue.

"I am thinking I am myself," the Highland girl replied. "And who else would I be, I wonder?"

"It's little ye ken!" he answered, partly in scorn, partly in pity. "Ye're a puir crayture and ye canna understand; I've tellt ye again and again, but the doctrine of the trans-motion of souls is beyond ye—"

"Ferry well, then," said Morag, sharply, "and if you are the black murderer you say, why are you not giving yourself up and going to be hanged?"

"Woman, woman, ye canna comprehend—is it no possible for your intelleck to comprehend? David Haggart was executed at Edinburgh the 18th of July, 1821; ye wadna hae twa men hanged for the same crime; and I declare tae ye there was no intent on my pairt to murder onybody. Indeed there was not. I had got the bag with a stane in't; I'll no deny that; but I hit the jiler only wan clowt wi't:

and then I rushed across the yard, and pulled the dub from my cloy, and opened the outside door. It was days efter before I kent that the jiler was deed. I was hidin' in some hay ; and I heard a woman asking a boy if the lad that had brokken oot o' Dumfries jile was catched yet, and he said, 'No, but the jiler deed last nicht at ten o'clock.' Dod, that was a fearsome thing to hear ; that was a different business frae snibbing a lil from a conish cove's suck—"

"Yes, and what will all that be ?" inquired Morag, with a supercilious air.

"Ay, they dinna ken everything in Mull !" he retorted, with a grim facetiousness. "They're no very gleg at the uptak, ur they ? It's a wise man that can follow his nose ; but they havena learnt that yet in Tobermory, or they wouldna be aye tummelin into the harbour. Oh, they're a fine set, the Tobermory chiels, keepin' up the New Year till the 15th o' December, and beginnin' again on the 16th. I heard tell there was yince a sober man discovered i' the streets o' Tobermory ; but they didna ken what to do wi' him, so they sent him to a lunatic asylum—"

Of a sudden Morag uttered three piercing shrieks, and her arm was outstretched, and her gaze was fixed on some distant point beyond the washing green.

"Look ! look ! look !" she cried. "It's the ghost of the Dumfries chiler ! It's the ghost of the murdered man."

Now in ordinary cold blood old Maxwell would not have allowed himself to be deceived by the cantrips of this Mull idiot ; but her yells had startled him out of his senses ; involuntarily he wheeled round, to see what the terrible thing was ; and at the same moment Morag, using the only weapon she happened to have handy—which was the blacking brush—struck him fair and full between the shoulders, and that with a force that sent him staggering forward on all-fours. What happened next the Mull lass did not stay to observe. She had fulfilled her instructions : only she did not know that, as she swiftly picked up the boots and shoes and fled for refuge to the housekeeper's room, there was someone else besides herself who was in fits of laughter—and that was a young lady concealed behind some laurel-bushes.

The great bunches of phlox—so sweet and cool in their

delicate perfume—were most welcome to the weary-eyed invalid; she cared less for the suggestion about the fried egg and the hot tea; she seemed to prefer the dumb twilight of the blinds being down, and the gracious quiet; while her daughter's voice, as she stole about the room, was as soft as velvet. So the day passed somehow; and then in the afternoon a visitor arrived, whom Eelin went down to receive, with apologies for her mother's absence. The visitor was Lord Mountmahon; and he appeared to be labouring under some sense of injury.

"Oh, really, now, really, really," said he, "I never was so badly treated in all my life. Do you think I'd have gone to that twopenny-halfpenny kick-up unless on the understanding you were to be there? Why, everybody was saying you would be the Queen of the Ball! Yes, and there I was—there I was—waiting and watching—waiting and watching—but where were you? What made the assembly shine? Well, the assembly didn't shine!—not much! And of course I must fall into the hands of that old cat Lady Grillesmere; and I'll be hanged if she hasn't got fifteen thousand nieces—well, to be strictly honest and accurate, I'll take off a thousand—and I'll be dashed if she hasn't got fourteen thousand nieces—and all of them have sandy hair, and all of them squint; and may I never if I hadn't to dance with every man-jack of them—"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Lord Mountmahon," said Eelin, somewhat inappropriately; but she did not heed much what she said; she was less afraid now of the potboy-looking young man.

"Yes, you may well think that," he answered her, commiserating himself. "All sandy-haired, all squint-eyed—twenty thousand of them I believe there were—and the old cat was inexorable—one down, t'other come on—not a minute's time for a cigarette and a whiskey-and-soda—and me looking for you all the time—why, of course!—the Queen of the Ball—the Queen of the Ball, they said—and I will confess to you that I did hear my name coupled with yours—rather gratifying, don't you know—a happy omen—yes, there was more than one little reference——"

"Oh, indeed," said Eelin, with the big young eyes staring; who had dared in so public a way to mention her name in conjunction with this microcephalous lout?

"Ah, never mind," said he, with great satisfaction. "We'll make up for it to-night: better late than never; no crying over spilt milk, and that's my motto. And mind you save all the barn-doors for me, Miss Eelin——"

"But I am not going to the ball to-night, Lord Mountmahon," said she.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Oh, but that's nonsense; you certainly are; I can't be cheated twice running—every one mentioning names—and forecasting a little event. Queen of the Ball, that's what you are going to be; and we'll just show them what a barn-door is like, when we put a little swag into it. Why, bless my soul, not going to-night——"

"My mother is not well: I mean to stay at home——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" he said, with gay good-humour. "Your staying at home won't make your mother any better. Why, what do you suppose I'm in Invernish for? Do you suppose I came in here to teetotumise round Lady Grillesmere's thirty thousand sandy-haired nieces? Why, I'm supposed to be entertaining a house party at Kinvaig; and do you imagine I don't know what they'll be up to the moment my back is turned? But I do know—yes I do. Off to the hill they go—and not one of them able to hit a haystack—and they blaze and blaze—my cartridges, mind—oh, yes they take precious good care of that—hundreds and hundreds ordered out from Watson, in Inglis-street—all to my account—and they blaze and blaze—and the keepers driven mad—and the dogs demoralised—and the ground spoilt—and at the end of the day an old grey hen or a solitary curlew to show for the lot of 'em. Yes, and netting the pools—ah, but I know—I'm up to their tricks——"

"Then why do you invite people of that kind?" Miss Eelin asked, naturally enough.

"They're such comical devils!" he protested. "They keep things going—firing ahead—getting a rise out of someone—plenty of gammon and spinach. For that's my motto: always on the do. You only live once; bless my soul, what's the use of getting down below the daisies prematurely?—you'll be there long enough. Keep on the do: that's my motto. Why, there's little Teddy Hicks—I must bring him here some day—oh, yes, I will—just make you die of laughing—his description of a fellow proposing

to a girl and finding his nose begin to bleed—in a blue funk, of course—lost his handkerchief—I tell you, it's the funniest thing—I've seen a whole dinner-table in fits. And talking of a proposal—no, no, my dearest girl, don't you look frightened!—I'm content to wait: it's quite true I never take no for an answer—what's the good!—but I'm not an early Christian persecutor; I would rather let the little idea simmer in your mind, till you get to see how reasonable it is. And if I haven't the gift of the gab, there's one thing I do know: you'd find yourself dashed well looked after. Ah, wouldn't you, though! Your mother tells me you've never been in Brighton. Good gracious, to think of such a thing! Bless me, the very centre of life—the very centre of everything that's worth anything—the King's Road—the Old Ship—a slap-up suite of rooms—sunshine galore—the coaches coming and going—tootle-too all the morning—old pals waving you a hand—bless me—good gracious—why, that's life! Keep things moving. No stagnation for this infant. Why, I'd rather be dead and buried right off the reel than have to crawl and crawl to the grave. Miss Eelin, I can see you on the first floor of the Old Ship, looking out. Oh, I know the place: trust me: you trust me: if I can't order a ripping little lunch for the two of us, then take me away and fling me into the nearest horse-pond. And you're coming to that ball to-night. Yes, you are. Your mother's sure to be better by then. I'll be waiting for you—now mind. All the barn-doors: and we'll sit out the lancers—and the waltzes, too, if you like: and we'll make it a perpetual bun-fight for old Mother Helmsdale. And as for the fifteen thousand three hundred and forty-seven sandy-haired nieces of Lady Grillesmere, don't you see, I've polished them off already—waiting for you, that's what it was—and now you've got to make it up to me, for fair play's a jewel—and you're not going to cheat me to-night again—"

At this moment the drawing-room door was opened, and Miss Lily Neile was announced: whereupon—after some further insistence that Eelin must not fail him at the ball—Mountmahon took his departure.

"Oh, Eelin, is it true?" cried Lily Neile.

"Is what true?" Eelin made answer—and the proud lips were not the less proud.

"Why, what every one is saying—about you and Lord Mountmahon!"

"I cannot help them saying what they choose to say," responded Eelin of the eyes like the blue sea-wave, "but—but—at least I—I considered you were my friend. And you could think that of me!"

At which there was a mutual breaking-down, and much of hugging and kissing and protestation and tears, for this girl, high-spirited as she might be, perhaps was not quite so confident about the future as she pretended to herself.

CHAPTER XXX.

RUMOURS AND TIDINGS.

NOISELESS as a night-moth Eelin stole to her mother's room, and carefully opened the door. But the moment she glanced inward she perceived that no further precaution was needed; the blinds were drawn up; nectarines and biscuits were on the small table; the invalid, propped with pillows, was blandly reading a newspaper.

"Ah, this is better!" said the girl. "This is more like the thing! And now, Mummie, darling, do you really feel strong and well enough to bear the shock of a piece of news? For it's rather tremendous. It's rather terrific—"

"Eelin, what have you done now?" said the instantly frightened mother; she never could tell what this mad wretch might have been after.

"Oh, nothing much. Only this—I'm engaged to be married."

"Eelin—Eelin—not to that man!"

"It's to a man certainly."

"But—but—" said the mother, who unawares had been startled into sincerity. "Kate has just been in—she said Lord Mountmahon was in the drawing-room—only a minute or two ago——"

"Mummie, is that what you were afraid of? Then you might have been honest before," said Eelin—and it was a gentle form of reproach. "You've given me more than one sleepless night. For of course I had to think—to imagine—what your wishes might be; and also what others might expect of me. He offered me a great position, no doubt; and lots of our people are very poor; yes, I did think of it; though I've just been quarrelling with Lily Neile for daring to think that I thought of it; yes, I did think of it; and

I'm a beast; and then after all I came to the conclusion that the scattered Macdonalds of Kinvaig, however badly off they might be, would not wish me to sell myself body and soul for their benefit.—"

The Bean-an-Tighearn's face grew very white.

"If there's one of them thinks that, then it's the lowermost of the halls of perdition for him or her!"*

"—— and then you see, Mummie," continued Miss Eelin, in quite a gay fashion, "there came along a young man—such a nice, biddable, obedient young man—no *attendrissements* if objected to—intellectual companionship and no further—and there was a moonlight night—it was last night, in fact—and perhaps I was a little off my head—only, I promised!"

"But who is it, Eelin?" the mother cried.

"Who else could it be than Mr. Gilchrist?"

"That young newspaper-man? Eelin, this is too serious a subject for joking!"

"I am not joking, mother!"

"But that young man?" the mother protested, in rather a bewildered way. "Why, he has no name—no position—no means—"

"That is so," replied Eelin, contentedly. "We shall have to be satisfied with low living and high thinking—especially the low living. But then, to have married a genius! Earls and marquises are common enough, all over the country; but how many poets are there? There may be two in Scotland and three in England; and that's the very outside; and you have the great luck to marry one of these, instead of a common and ordinary person of rank or wealth; and you march along with him, side by side, to fame and still wider fame; and you find him material for his work; and you get to hear when his praises are sent back from Australia and Canada and America and India and South Africa, and wherever the English language is spoken, and you say to yourself: 'Well, I have done my little share.—'"

"Eelin, are you laughing at me, or are you out of your senses altogether?" the mother demanded.

"Neither the one nor the other, Mummie! Why, don't

* This is the English rendering of a Gaelic phrase—which is not used lightly by any Highland person.

you remember the pride that Tannahill felt when he heard a country-lass in a neighbouring field sing his own song, 'We'll meet beside the dusky glen, on yon burn-side'? What are titles, and honours, and heaps of wealth compared with a sensation like that? The titles are empty things, stupid things, inherited by any small-brained gaby; the masses of wealth are even more common and vulgar, you ought to be ashamed of them; but to know that ages after you have gone, this or that song of yours will be singing itself through the heart of your countrymen and country-women, and to know that whenever the poets of your native land are mentioned you will be remembered with acclaim and gratitude and affection, that's something: that's better than being a marquis or a millionaire. All of which, dearest Mummie, is out of an essay on Tannahill I am writing in conjunction with Archie Gilchrist."

"But—but—it can't be true, Eelin!" the poor mother said again; and then she added inconsequently: "Why, what could your reasons be for doing such an impossible thing?"

"My reasons?" answered the girl. "Look at me, Mummie." She herself went to the long mirror beside the dressing-table, and surveyed her not unattractive face and figure. "I am beautiful. I am noble-minded. I am modest. And yet no one ever asked me to marry him; and so, when this young man did, out of mere humility and thankfulness and surprise, I was bound to say yes. That's one reason. And here's another. The truth is, Mummie, I thought he might be a convenient harbour of refuge. You know, I wasn't feeling quite safe. I don't like it when a man tells you that he always gets what he wants; and when he has a gang of prizefighters at his command. Supposing I had been kidnipped: what should this kid have done if she had been napped?"

"Stuff and nonsense! We are living in a civilised country, and the things you talk of only happen in novels—"

"The things that happen in novels pretty often happen in real life; and what would you have said if your darling child had been captured and carried away into a solitary glen and starved into submission? Six burly prizefighters: what could I have done? Suppose they had carried me up

to a place like Stronelairg in the Monalea hills—what could I have done ?— "

"Nonsense—nonsense—do you think there is no law in this country ? " the mother said, impatiently.

"Well, Mummie, if there is any law up at Stronelairg, you could hide it under a four-leaved clover. Law ? There's nobody to enforce the law ! If a policeman went up into that desert he would die of laughing at his own helplessness— "

"Eelin," said her mother, "you are merely fencing. There is something behind. Tell me honestly now: if you think of marrying this Mr. Gilchrist—do you really care for him ? Tell me frankly now, do you love this young man you talk of marrying ? "

At this, self-conscious colour sprang into the girl's forehead, and her manner altered considerably. She came away from the mirror, and sate herself on the edge of the bed, and took her mother's hand and stroked it.

"Well, you see, Mummie," she said, with averted eyes, "there are some things it is rather difficult to talk about. I have a great respect for him. I consider him a gentleman, by nature and disposition. And I have a great admiration for his writing : it's finer than he himself knows : there are qualities in it that will take him far : there are large qualities—a kind of broad, manly, comprehensive out-of-doorness in his way of looking at things—a wide grasp, you might say—a sort of straight fashion of regarding human nature. His eyes are open and wide and honest ; he sees steadily and whole ; the hot-housy parasitic kind of literature he simply ignores. And I think these qualities will carry him far ; I think the public will recognise ; I am convinced he has a great future before him— "

" But, Eelin, do you care for him ! " the mother cried, in great concern—and even distress.

" Oh, yes, certainly," the girl made answer, though still with her eyes downcast. " Certainly. Oh, yes—in a way, you know. And the yoke is easy. It's all so vague and distant ; nothing near, and definite, and appalling. And then he quite comprehends that I am rather a stand-offish kind of person. I apologised to him. I apologised to him again and again, and said it was no doubt a defect of temperament ; and he was so kind, and so considerate, and so

sympathetic—he seemed to understand so easily—and I was so grateful—and—and I apologised—it was this morning—out at the Islands—I apologised to him—and I couldn't do more than that."

But at this point she suddenly threw herself alongside her mother; and in a moment their arms were round each other: and there was a good deal of crying on both sides, but no very reasonable explanation of the whole state of affairs. The fit did not last long. Eelin was going into the town; and she could pull herself together when she chose; and all she said when she left the room was this—

"Mother, be assured: I am making a marriage of discretion."

Nevertheless, as she went away along the river-bank, she walked with less of her usual buoyant stride; and instead of the Jacobite nonsense that usually filled her brain, there may have been graver questions, perhaps even forebodings; indeed so absent-minded was she that, at the corner of the Suspension-bridge, she was very nearly passing without recognition her old friend Mr. Allan Macdonald. Of course that could not have been possible had Angus the whilom water-bailiff at Kinvaig been with him; but on this occasion he was accompanied by a young fellow whose appearance did not happen to attract her attention. However, just as she had nearly gone by, some glint of sun happened to fall on the tall old man with the yellowish-white beard; and at once she turned, and went across to him, and told him who she was.

"Well, indeed, now, Miss Eelin, this is a chance!" said he, and he held her hand for more than a moment—while the young man retired a few paces to the parapet of the bridge and gazed over, perhaps on the outlook for a passing salmon. "For I was going out to pay you a visit; I was making bold enough to think that you might be interested in the news I have. And perhaps I was not right in that; but I have the news; and I was wishing to see you whatever, and to hear a few words of your voice—because hearing is easier for me than seeing——"

"I hope it is good news, Mr. Macdonald," said she—and she did not withdraw her hand.

"Oh, yes, it is good news, for me at least and no mistake

about that; for I am old, and grown very selfish, and I have been wishing to spend the few of my remaining years in my native land. And what do you think my son has done—the rascal! You see, he could not very well tell me by letter; for there would be a third person getting to know; and the code we have cannot carry everything. But here is the young fellow who was my private secretary—and will be so again now, but I will get a good place somewhere for Angus the bailiff, and do not you fear about that, Miss Eelin; and Somerled, well, Somerled sends this young man over as a kind of forerunner and emissary, to explain everything that could not be trusted to either a letter or a telegram. And Somerled—But perhaps I am detaining you, Miss Eelin—perhaps you would rather go on your way—"

"Oh, please tell me, Mr. Macdonald!" said she.

"Well, Somerled, you see, he has the ways of an emperor—he sends this courier before him to announce that he is coming over directly, and from what I can gather he means to make Scotland his home now; yes, I think that; he will stay here now—"

"Mr. Macdonald, what do you mean!" she said—and he might have felt the hand he held trembling a little—"You told me yourself that he said this country was no country for him—"

"Ay, he may have said that," the old man answered her; "but he has strange ideas, the Lad has. Shrewd and firm in business; and just daft outside. A strange fellow, Somerled always has been; but it was my fault: telling him about the old places, and the old stories, and the name that he bears, and the loyalty that he owes to the House of Kinvaig. But—but an old man is apt to be talkative, Miss Eelin—and maybe you would rather be going on—"

"Please tell me, Mr. Macdonald!" she pleaded. "What is it he intends?"

"Well, then, as I gather, he has made arrangements to leave himself personally free from all the different enterprises—yes, and the Commission to inquire into the working of the Canadian Civil Service—they wanted him to take the Chairmanship—but everything—everything he has got off his hands; and Scotland is all his cry. Maybe it is done to please me. I would not wonder at that. It would be

just like him : for he's a reckless fellow—the rascal ! And now we are to take some place where there will be trolling on a loch—a good big place—and a good long lease—"

"But he said this country was no country for him !—why did he go away ?"

"Oh, he had to go away, that I understand," the tall old man replied to her. "And then I kept lingering on here —I think mostly to listen to a word or two of your voice now and again, if you will permit me to say so, Miss Eelin ; and then he has been making his schemes and arrangements ; and maybe we shall find some place to settle in—"

"In the Highlands ?"

"Ay, yes, indeed ! Where else ? But not too far away from you, Miss Eelin, if I have any say in the matter ; for I should be wishing to hear a word of your speaking now and again, if you will be so kind to me. And that is all my news ; and I am sorry to have detained you."

Well, she said good-bye to him, and went on ; but she did not go into the town after all : when she crossed the Suspension-bridge, she turned back, and took her way to the Islands—they were a solitary place at this time of the afternoon.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ON THE CASTLE HILL.

Now when Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave walked into the town of Invernish, just as often as not she crossed over the first of the suspension-bridges and then made her way up the Castle hill into Castle-street; and on this particular morning, following the familiar route, she chanced to stop for a moment to survey the spacious scene—spacious enough, from the dim-azure mountains of Strathpeffer in the north to the duskier heights about Mealfourvonie in the south. But what struck her particularly was the extraordinary vividness of the objects right in front of her; the light was so clear and strong that the hill-side far away beyond the river burned a glory of green and yellow, and the small white cottages, no bigger than the size of an elongated lozenge, were so close that it seemed possible to her to stretch out a forefinger and touch them; while up the stream the shimmering silver under the weir was so intensely brilliant that she thought she could have thrown a fly, from where she stood, on to that sheet of glinting water. As for the heavens over her head, they had in them the blue of the north, that is to say, not the misty turquoise of the summer climates of the south, but the deep, ineffable sapphire of skies perpetually washed by the Atlantic rains.

And so she was idly looking around—at the slopes and woods of the Black Isle—at the gleam of the Beauly Firth—at the dark mountains down by Glen Urquhart—when it suddenly occurred to her that a figure seated on a form just on the other side of the strip of greensward was familiar to her; and then, on the impulse of the moment, she forgot

the bye-laws, she stepped across the grass and approached the stranger.

"Mr. Gilchrist," said she, shyly; and in a second he had jumped up; and it would have been difficult to determine which of the two was the more blushing and embarrassed. But at all events he had sufficient presence of mind to whip aside the batch of magazines he had beside him on the bench; and she accepted the mute invitation; and seated herself there.

"I am sorry if I have interrupted you at your work," she remarked, in a demure manner.

"But it isn't work!" he exclaimed. "You don't understand. If you knew the conditions of life in Struthers's shop! All this is merely amusement—delight: look at the hills—the sea—"

"But I am afraid I have interrupted you," she said, and she rose.

"Eelin, this is not very kind, considering our relations," he observed, gravely; and there was something in the tone of his voice that rather brought her to her senses. She resumed her seat.

"Well, after all," she said, "perhaps I may not be entirely destroying your time if you think there's anything to be made of some verses I have got in my pocket. One of the girls in our house sings them now and again—Morag they call her; she is a girl from Mull; and I thought I would take them down; that is, in a sort of English—very bad and literal and commonplace, I know; but I fancied you might give them some proper literary form—you might make something of them, perhaps. There are plenty of songs about Mull; but I never heard this one before; and I am quite aware the translation I have attempted is most horribly matter-of-fact: I suppose I ought not to show it to you; it's only a servant-girl's song, after all; only, you might put it into shape, if you saw anything in it. My mother could have made a better rendering, for she knows the refinements of the Gaelic better than I do, but I did not wish to bother her about a trifle; so you must just tell me if there's anything in the verses that could be of any slight use to you——"

And so, with some little timidity—Wild Eelin grown timid!—she produced the piece of MS., and Archie Gilchrist

read this version of the song that the Mull lass used to sing in her exile :

I am thinking of the dear isle of my youth;
Sweet is the milk there, and sweet the breath of the morning;
Many is the mile that I used to ramble
In Mull of the hills.

There was the lad that my heart thought of,
John, the son of Red Hector of the Ferry;
But the big ship took him; he will return, ah, never,
To Mull of the hills.

And now I am living among strangers;
They are kind to me, but their faces are strange;
And in the night my eyes are flowing with tears
Thinking of Mull of the hills.

It is the loved home set in the wide seas;
Ay, many and many is the time I am wishing to be there;
Oh, my heart would burst within me if I saw no more
My dear Mull of the hills.

When he had finished, his lips were firm.

"If I have any voice in the matter," said he, "there shall not be one word altered. These verses are true. They are the real thing. That is the Celtic cry—like a sea-bird calling in the night—the solitariness—the remoteness—the passionate longing for home. The east-country people could not understand it at all; the Edinburgh fellows would laugh at it; the English—well, the English might suspect there was some quality in it— "

"Good gracious, Mr. Gilchrist," she cried, "you are cutting off everybody. Where is my wee audience to come in?"

"One Highland person," said he (for what will not a lover say in his mad enthusiasm?). "That is enough. Touch one heart. What do you care about fifty millions of Anglo-Saxons? No; but if one Highland man or woman, with tears running from the eyes, says 'Thank you!' that is enough. And I will not alter a word. Not a word. That is the true thing. What about literary form? If it were put into literary form, the south-country people, the east-country people, the Edinburgh lawyer-people, would not understand it one bit the more. For these verses are of the West Highlands; they are beating with the heart of the West Highlands: it is not for other people to understand. That is what I say. There

is the cry of the sea in these lines; they must not be altered. The people who do not understand—can go without. The people who are alien from the West Highlanders—the people who can describe a Highlander as saying of himself 'Am I not a bonny fighter?' they are as far away from the Highlands as Milwaukee is; and who cares? But I say these verses have the real ring. There is the smell of seaweed in them. There is the north wind—blowing from Morven. And not a word shall be altered, by me."

Which was indeed a wild rhapsody about a trivial song: but then these lines had been pencilled by fingers which were somewhat precious to him; and she was sitting close by him; and also there may have been some kind of exaltation in the largeness of the landscape confronting them, from Fortrose round to the hills about Glen Strathfarrar.

"Not one word," said he. "That is the true thing. That has the Celtic cry. That has the loneliness in it. That has the sea in it—and the distance—and the passionate longings of the heart. As for me, I will not touch it; I know better."

"Well," said she, submissively, "I must trust your judgment, for you have read so much more than I have. But yet most people might think—"

"I don't care for the most people," he said. "I care for the one or two people who can understand. How many persons do you imagine have ever heard a sea-bird calling in the night?—it is a thing to remember. And I say this has the true cry; and I do not care one penny farthing about literary form: when you have got hold of a good thing, keep it—do not touch it—do not spoil it—not a syllable."

And all this tirade because these lines had been traced out by certain small fingers that he knew; he looked at each word as if it were a sacred thing; Morag's nostalgic wail had become of extraordinary value in secret ways.

She rose to go.

"Good-bye, Mr. Gilchrist," she said.

"Mr. Gilchrist?" he repeated, reproachfully.

"Oh, well, Archie—isn't that more simple and natural? Good-bye!"

"But may not I go with you?" he said.

"Very well—very well," she answered him, "if it is not troubling you. But I have to call on Mr. Edel—and there may be a little time—"

"I shall be delighted to wait," said he; and so they set out together; and she was happily content, for there were no silly caressings—out here in the open, with the wide seas and the blue hills and the green uplands surrounding them. It was a literary companionship.

"And I want to say this to you, Mr. Gilchrist—I mean Archie—that is more natural, isn't it?—when you happen to quote any of the old Scotch songs, you should have the real version. Last week in the *Observer*, you had 'Maxwellton braes are bonnie.' It isn't Maxwellton braes at all! It is

'Maxwelltown banks are bonnie
Where early fa's the dew,
Where me and Annie Laurie
Made up the promise true.'

And 'her neck is like the swan!' Good gracious, what woman ever had a neck like a swan? The original is more robust: 'She's breistit like the swan'——"

"Of course you know those old songs better than I do, dear Eelin," said he, quite humbly; and then he went on: "Your mother was telling me you had a version of the 'Banks of Loch Lomond'——"

"Oh, spurious—entirely spurious!" said she. "Wretched doggerel. It is my own immortal composition. But would you like me to sing it to you?" she continued, for she was in a friendly mood, and there chanced to be a bench close by, just outside the Court-house. And there they sate down again; and she (with a preliminary glance round to make sure there were no listeners—and with her hands resting on her knees) began in a very gentle fashion

O fair shines the sun upon Huntly's green shaw,
And the mavis and merlie are singing;
And blithe is the bride as she steps through the ha';
And a' the kirk bells they are ringing.
An' ye'll tak the high road, an' I'll tak the laigh,
An' I'll be in Scotland before ye;
But me and my true love will never meet again,
By the bonnie, bonnie banks o' Loch Lomond.

It was a cruel thing to do—though there was no intentional cruelty in the doing of it. But there are some things a man carries with him to the grave. And Archie Gilchrist was not the first whom the tones of Wild Eelin's voice had wounded deep—to say nothing of the splendid April beauty of her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ARRIVAL.

Miss Eelin went into the railway-station, and walked up to the book-stall.

"Would you let me come inside for a few minutes?" she said to the young lady in charge, who was a friend of hers.

"Oh, certainly, Miss Eelin!"

"For the one-thirty train from the south will be in directly," she continued, "and I've just heard that an acquaintance of mine is coming by it; and I should like to have a glimpse of him, without his seeing me. An acquaintance, you know, merely an acquaintance—that is the reason for my asking you, for there might be a little embarrassment if I were to meet him face to face; at the same time it is but natural there should be a little curiosity when one arrives from far countries——"

The young lady was regarding her with some concern.

"Miss Eelin, you are not looking well. Will you let me bring you something from the refreshment room?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Eelin, with a bold assumption of unconcern. "The news was rather sudden, you see—that's all: only a few minutes ago. And the air is rather cold and shivery this morning, isn't it? Or perhaps it's too hot for this time of the year. I think that's it: too hot and sultry, for this time of the year, and one feels a little bit upset sometimes. And do you think that no one can see in here, as the passengers are leaving the station?"

"I will make certain-sure of that," said the young lady, and she promptly shut the side-door of the book-stall.

"I am so sorry to inconvenience you——"

"It would be strange if anything you asked for was an

inconvenience, Miss Eelin," said the young lady; "and I am sure you are always welcome to anything we can do for you. And I wish you would let me get you some tea from the refreshment-room."

"Oh, no—no, thank you," was the answer. "I only want to have a look at the arrivals—silly curiosity, that's all—stupid and silly; but, as I say, I have just heard of an acquaintance likely to come by this train."

She began to tremble a little, for there was a sound of confusion on the further platform, and presently the first of the trolleys bringing personal luggage came into view. But whatever her eyes may have been doing—and they were keen enough—they were deer-stalker's eyes—whatever her eyes may have been doing, she maintained a brave show of indifference; she regarded each successive traveller as though it were his costume that interested her; and if, on one particular figure—if her eyes did follow—if her heart murmured to itself, "Ah, but what did you mean—why did you say this country was no country for you?"—nothing of the kind was heard by her companion. Then she bought some newspapers and magazines; and went out and called a cab; and told the driver to take her home by way of Inglis-street; she did not wish to go round by Church-street—for then she would be passing the Caledonian Hotel. She was looking constrained and perturbed; but she was not crying; nay, when she got out to Glengarva House she marched into the hall with her usual martial stride; and she was saying to herself—or pretending to say to herself—with some semblance of swagger—

> "Wha the de'il hae we gotten for a King,
> But a wee, wee German lairdie!"

But when she got into the drawing-room, and found her mother there, she said—

"Mummie, do you think a glass of claret would do me any harm?"

"My darling!" the mother cried. "You look ghastly! What is the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing," she made answer. "There is something peculiar about the weather, I think; it's rather chilly, and makes me shiver. And I won't have the claret, Mummie. If you don't mind, I would rather lie down on

the couch for a little while. Such strange things happen to people, especially when you yourself chance to be rather silly. Oh, I wish I was somebody else—or away anywhere else—or dead—or anything!" She had hidden her head in the cushion, so that the overflowing eyes did not show. "Oh, don't you bother about me, Mummie. I'm simply a terrific ass. I've got everything in the world I could wish for; and now—now it's the moon, I suppose. I wish I had a grain of common sense. But such strange things happen—and you don't expect them—and if you're an idiot they upset you—"

"Eelin, what does all this mean?" the mother demanded.

"Oh, Mummie, don't speak harshly to me—just now," the girl pleaded, in pitiful tones. "A little later on—you can scold me—yes, a little later on I will take the scolding—for I'm such an awful fool—and I deserve it—but if you only knew—if you only knew——"

"If I only knew what?" the mother exclaimed, and she had grown very pale.

"I have seen some one—and it was rather unexpected—and—and then this weather is so trying to the nerves—it's merely the weather—it tries one's nerves—it sets one shaking." And then there was a piteous little cry of confession: "Oh, mother, mother, I would to God I were dead—for now I know what I have done." The mother and daughter by this time were not far apart.

And then she rose and went to the window quickly, so as again to hide her eyes.

"Look, mother, look!—here is Lily Neile fishing the Devil's Kirn. Doesn't she cast a beautiful line! Fergus says I can cast as good a line as she can; but that's only flattery; I know I can't. She can lick my head off. But I can swim, you know; I can swim; and sooner or later I will get from the Devil's Kirn to the end of the weir—or burst a blood-vessel——"

"Eelin, what are you talking about!" the mother said, anxiously. "What was it you told me just now? Who was it you saw in the town?"

"Mummie, you wouldn't have me disgrace myself by mentioning the name of a man who never threw a thought in my direction? You don't ask that, do you? And besides, one has to be loyal to one's promise. I am engaged

to be married: what have I to do with a man who never had a look or a thought for me?—"

At this moment a servant-maid tapped at the door, opened it, and brought in a large and sumptuous basket of fruit, adorned with maiden-hair fern. It was rather like carrying trees to Lochaber (as the Gaelic expresses it) but the intention was there; and when Mrs. Macdonald came to examine the card she read aloud—

"*With the compliments of Mr. Allan Macdonald and of Somerled Macdonald.* Somerled Macdonald," she went on. "Why, that is the younger man—who was so generous to you with his thousand pound cheque. I did not know he had come back to Invernish."

"Oh, yes, this morning," said Eelin, carelessly. "I heard of it by accident. But of course he will be going on somewhere. He says this country is no country for him. Very well: it's good enough for the people who live in it."

The mother regarded the girl narrowly.

"Eelin," she said, "it was Somerled Macdonald you saw to-day."

"Oh, he was one of many," Eelin responded, in an off-hand kind of fashion. "I was in at the book-stall; and there were a good many passengers by the mid-day train; I just caught a glimpse of the younger Macdonald as he was leaving the station. I did not see him afterwards; for I came home by Inglis-street. And that reminds me, Mummie; I made a joke yesterday. Do you feel strong? Are your nerves quite firm? For this is a joke and no mistake!"

"You kill me with impatience, Eelin!" said the mother, derisively.

"You think I cannot make a joke? I tell you, I am making them all day along; but then the majority of them are so subtle that they are not perceived. And do you suppose the readers of the Invernish *Observer* will understand this one if I introduce it by chance into an article?—"

"Come, come, Eelin, what is your wonderful jest?"

"Well, it's about a Cockney sportsman who came to Invernish and wanted to have a day on the Nish—the next day happened to be a free day—and he sent round to Mr. Watson the tackle-maker in Inglis-street for half-a-dozen Spey casts."

The Bean-an-Tighearn stared blankly.

"Ah, no," Eelin proceeded with a sigh, "I see that it is not going to be understood. It's so excellent and beautiful—just like me—that I shall have to keep it to myself. It must go to the grave with me unappreciated. This is a cold and a cruel world; and the best, and wisest, and most exquisite things in it—like me—are not valued at our proper worth." She turned again to the window, and professed to be entirely interested in the slow creeping down of the white boat, with the supple figure of Lily Neile putting a fly over the Devil's Kirn—though not with a Spey cast. Perhaps Wild Eelin's mother was not wholly imposed upon by her daughter's elaborate show of bravado.

Presently the mother said—

"I suppose we ought to ask those two Canadian Macdonalds to dinner."

"Oh, yes; I'm no mindin'," was the reply—the marked indifference of which did not entirely deceive.

"Eelin, what is the matter!" the mother cried, with tears in her voice. "You are concealing something."

And then the girl faced round.

"Why, mother, one has to meet one's fate and accept it. What is the use of whimpering? It's only cowardice to whimper—"

"And yet a minute ago you were wishing you were dead—"

"Only a figure of speech, Mummie—only a figure of speech. You see, writing for the newspapers leads into tricks of metaphor—and—and exaggeration. If I blurted out some nonsense, don't you pay any heed, Mummie. At this present moment I am wishing I could throw a line as delicate as Lily Neile's; and also I am wondering when I am to make another try at swimming from Devil's Kirn to the weir. Do you think I can't do it? But I can. I was rather cheated the last time, for I took the wrong side of the current; but I'll subdue the beast yet; and there's not another girl in Invernish can do it. I'll manage him——"

"Eelin," said the mother, "it's not about swimming up the river you are thinking."

"And why not? It's a noble ambition. Oh, well," she said, "if you are asking those two Macdonalds, why not ask

Archie Gilchrist as well?—he ought to be in evidence. And Lily Neile would make the party even."

"Oh, yes, yes, all that is simple enough! But you are hiding something. Eelin, what made you say you wished you were dead?"

"Because I was talking blethers! People say things like that at random—especially when the weather is rather depressing. But don't you be afraid about me, Mummie: I am not going to be depressed. You won't catch me whimpering. I can face my fate like other people. What's the use of whimpering? Only children whimper. And what you've done is your own fault; and you've got to take the consequences: and what is the good of whimpering about it? You've got to make a brave fight of it, without troubling people who are a hundred times better than yourself—and by that I mean, you, Mummie. Why, look at this little bit of Heine that I have been trying to translate: like my impudence, of course; bashing my head against the impossible."

She took a scrap of paper from her purse, and handed it to the Bean-an-Tighearn; and these were the lines she read—

Who loves a first time is a god,
Though he should be forsaken;
Who hapless loves a second time
Must for a fool be taken.

And such a fool who loves without
Response of love am I:
Sun, moon, and stars they laugh at me,
And I laugh too—and die.

Familiar as the original was to her, the translation seemed to agitate Eelin's mother strangely; for indeed this wild lass was the sole object of her devotion and concern. And when Eelin, in a heedless fashion, was going on to say—

"Now that is the courageous attitude; and then you must remember it was the utterance of a sick man——" she found herself suddenly interrupted.

"Eelin, Eelin," said the mother, in trembling tones, "what is it you have been hiding from me? Have you had two love affairs, and both of them unhappy?"

"Indeed, I have not then," answered the girl, in rather

an authoritative and yet pacificatory and loving way, "Mummie, you really must not pay any attention to my blethers; but rest content; and keep well: that's the one important matter. What are my trumpery affairs?—it's you that is to be considered. Of course it is!"

And thereupon Eelin announced with quite a gay air that she was going into the garden to get some fresh flowers for the dining-room table; and her mother looked after her with apprehensive eyes—and also with an aching heart, dreading unknown things.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

'SEI MIR GEGRUESST, MAROSA!'

"EELIN—Eelin!" called aloud Lily Neile, as she walked along one of the shell-gravelled pathways of the garden, with Michaelmas daisies on the one side, and sunlit geraniums and calceolarias on the other; and ever she kept peering and asking with her eyes. But this was a large garden; and it was divided by thick hedges of holly; and it was difficult to say whether it was empty of human kind or not. So again she called: "Eelin, you wretch—Eelin—where the mischief are you!"—and again there was no answer. But at length old Maxwell came out from one of the dim-paned glass houses.

"What's your will, Miss?"—and he did raise his cap, though he was of south-country upbringing.

"I want Miss Eelin—I was told she was in the garden," said Miss Neile.

"She's in the ither gairden—through the door ower thonder; and jist tak tent, for she's shootin' wi' that fiery wee pistol o' hers, and naebody dawr gang near the place."

So Miss Lily made her way by the thicket of red and white raspberries, and along a path outside a forest of apple trees, until she came to a wooden door, and then she boldly lifted the latch and entered. This second garden was an oblong and spacious piece of ground entirely surrounded by lofty brick walls; on the northern of these walls were trained nectarines, peaches, plums, and the like; while most of the long beds were given over to various vegetables; but on this particular morning it appeared to have been turned into a shooting-alley, for at the upper end there had been erected a target of wood, and on the target a bull's-eye about as big as a saucer had been painted white, with a

black ring round it, while there was another black ring still further out. Indeed, the moment after Lily Neile had lifted the latch there was a ringing report; and as she knew that the shot had been fired she had no hesitation about advancing.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Eelin, turning round from her examination of the target; and she came forward in a menacing manner, "Lily Neile, I have a great mind to kill you!"

"What have I done!" exclaimed the visitor, in amazement.

"Why, for the last hour I have been trying to get six shots consecutively into the bull's-eye; and this time I had got five in; and I was dead on with the sixth—oh, I know it—I know it perfectly well—and my finger was on the trigger—and just as I was about to fire came the click of the latch that startled me—and I couldn't help firing all the same—and what's the result? The sixth shot is a good inch out of the bull's-eye, and my chance is spoilt!"

"Never mind," said Lily Neile, philosophically. "Give me a shot, and if that gets into the bull's-eye, you can say that those in the bull's-eye are all yours, and that mine is the one outside."

"Oh, you cheat!" responded Eelin, indignantly. "But you can have a shot if you like." And she was about to hand over the revolver with its gold-mounted and richly-engraved handle when something made her pause. "I say, Lily, do you know anything about firearms?"

"Oh, yes," replied the other, with the utmost nonchalance. "I have many a time lighted a *pioye*."*

Eelin shrieked with laughter at this innocent confession.

"But I know I have a very straight eye," said Lily Neile, boldly.

"Very well, take the shot, and mind you aim at the very middle of the white disc. A few yards further on you will find a cord stretched across: there you must stand. The next chamber is loaded—and so are three or four more; as you have another shot or two if you are not successful.

* The writer of these pages is entirely ignorant of the derivation of this word; but the thing itself is a cone of kneaded gunpowder and water, which, when set alight at its apex, fizzes in fine pyrotechnic style right down to its base.

Keep your eye steadily on the sight, and on the middle of the white circle."

It is not to be denied that Lily Neile received that gold-mounted weapon with a little apprehension, however courageous her outward demeanour might be; moreover she seemed uncertain about the revolver itself.

"Shouldn't you lift up something before you shoot?" she asked.

"No, no, the trigger will do all that for you. All you've got to mind is to fill this notch with the sight; and then keep the sight on the centre of the bull's-eye; and hold your hand steady; and then pull."

"I don't know anything about these new-fashioned things," said Lily Neile, fretfully.

Nevertheless she went forward to the extended cord; she had a look at the target: she raised her arm, and for a long time she was taking aim—Eelin meanwhile observing that the muzzle of the revolver was describing the strangest figures in the air. Then there was a loud report; and the same instant Wild Eelin knew that something had whizzed by close to her ear, ending its flight among the plaster behind one of the trained plum-trees. The remarkable agility she displayed in skipping back and hiding herself in the doorway was most admirable. "It is time for this infant to quit the field of battle," she said to herself. "That fire-eater has more shots to swagger about with." But nothing was further from the mind of Lily Neile. She came quickly along, looking rather frightened.

"What was that?" she said. "What happened?"

"What happened?" said Eelin. "Well, you must have missed the target altogether, and the bullet must have struck an angle of one of the bricks in the wall; and then it must have ricochéd down in this direction, just missing me and then ripping along old Maxwell's plums and nectarines."

"Here, Eelin," said Lily Neile, with decision, "let us take this blessed thing into the house: you know I believe I can shoot very well: yes, I do; for everybody says I have an uncommonly straight eye, and what more do you want? But I am not accustomed to newfangled toys of that kind."

"It's a toy that can send a bullet through an amazingly thick plank of wood," said Eelin, as they set out on their return to the house, by way of an alley between apple and

pear trees on the one hand and on the other a wilderness of currant bushes.

"Look here, old girl," said Lily Neile, "what I came to ask you about was this: are you going to be a howling swell at to-night's dinner, or only a middling swell?"

"I'm not going to be a swell at all," was the reply, "for the affair is to be quite simple and informal."

"You just tell me what you're going to wear, and then I'll know what to do," said the cautious Miss Lily.

Then the cryptic details were given, and the invited guest seemed content. The next question was:

"Is Lord Mountmahon coming?"

"Lord Mountmahon is not coming," said Eelin, with a certain emphasis.

"If he wants to come here, he'll come, you know," said Lily Neile.

"How?" asked Eelin, with the big blue eyes staring.

"Oh, that's the common talk about him," her companion made answer. "He doesn't stand on ceremony. He'll just stroll in——"

"And then he'll be pitched out, that's all!" said Eelin, viciously. "Why, there are two young men coming to this little dinner either of whom could take up Lord Mountmahon and throw him over the hedge into General Mallock's garden."

"Ah, but that's not the way things are done," observed the philosophic Lily. "If he wants to be present at your dinner this evening, he would lounge in and call on your mamma a few minutes before seven; and he would stay on until the guests began to arrive. And then he would say: 'My dear lady, I fear I am intruding; I did not know you dined so early; or I should not have called so late.' And how could your mother help inviting him to stay and dine with you—especially when the gong sounds?"

"Is there no common decency?" demanded Eelin, with proud lips.

"Not where Lord Mountmahon is concerned," answered Lily Neile, coolly, "when he wants anything. At least so they say. It may be all scandal. I don't know him myself; and if all stories are true, I'd as lieve be without his acquaintance."

Then for a short-cut they crossed the drying-green; they

entered the shadow of the grove of trees in which Eelin's swing was hung; they were still in shadow—that of the great black araucaria—when they came to the ivied red-stone house (with Eelin's honeysuckle bower half-hidden in the corner, and protected from the western gales by a lofty hedge); but when they emerged into the open, there was a fine brilliant scene displayed before them—the long terrace, with its limes, and chestnuts, and sycamores, overlooking the glancing river, the wide tennis-lawn basking in the sunlight, the garden-plots rich in their lambent colour, the gorgeous dahlias, the pale Marguerites, pansies yellowish-white and purple-black, petunias, begonias, fairy rings of blue lobelias, and here and there a few standard roses. And as she looked abroad over these joyous surroundings, she may have said inwardly to herself: "And sometime I shall be leaving them all—and for what?" And perhaps, not being a coward, she may not have said anything of the kind.

That evening, a little while before dinner, Eelin went into her mother's dressing-room with some cards in her hand.

"Look here," she said, "Mummie. I've got the cards written out; and I have been trying to arrange the table; but do you know this that if you have a little dinner-party of six, three men and three women, and if you wish to have them alternated as they ought to be, you must have a man to preside at the foot of the table."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" said the Bean-an-Tighearn, who was in the hands of her maid. "It's you who must be at the foot of the table, of course."

"Not to be done," said Eelin, with decision. "I've tried it every way. And as we must have a man, I propose it should be Archie Gilchrist."

"Eelin, what new madness now?" her mother exclaimed. "If it is as you say—if I must have one of the gentlemen as my *vis-à-vis*,—why not Mr. Somerled Macdonald?"

"He's a stranger! Whereas Archie Gilchrist is familiar with the ways of the house."

"Well, settle it as you please—and at once; for they'll be here directly."

And thus it was that when the guests had arrived—and they arrived almost simultaneously—and when the announcement had been made that dinner had been served, and when

the little procession had filed into the dining-room, Archie Gilchrist discovered that he had had an all too conspicuous place accorded to him at the foot of the table—opposite his hostess, in fact—and in great fear he was and trepidation. Nevertheless the general hum of conversation reassured him somewhat; and he found he had nothing to carve, which was a great relief; and Wild Eelin, who sate next him, did her best to put him at his ease with her merry talk and her jeers and jests. And all the time he knew that both she and he were under the earnest scrutiny of young Somerled Macdonald—well, not scrutiny exactly, for there was nothing peering, or critical, or supercilious about it; it was rather the sympathetic and kindly observation of a pair of strong and steady eyes—the eyes of a man. And Archie would fain have had her pay a trifle more attention, and talk a little more, to this stranger from over the wide seas. But Eelin appeared to be constrained and troubled: when she did turn to Somerled (he sate on her right) and asked him a formal question or two as to the part of the Highlands he intended settling down in, Gilchrist almost believed that the fingers that held her knife and fork shook a little. But surely she had nothing to fear from the owner of those strong, calm eyes, that were so gentle, and that regarded her so gently.

Now this young railway-king who was conspicuous chiefly by his quiet dignity and modest self-effacement, and by the extreme deference he paid to the Lady of the House of Kinvaig, was not so far removed in point of years from the young folk at Eelin's end of the table; but somehow he seemed alien from them and their occupations and amusements. He listened with the most friendly interest; and his powerful, clear, steadfast eyes regarded this one and that; but mostly he was silent; for why should he speak of things of which he knew nothing? Bicycling, for example—he could not understand why Lily Neile should be so fierce in her denunciation of lady-bicyclists. Well, no one at that table save Lily Neile herself knew the why. It was this. Eelin Macdonald, with her supple and muscular figure and her enterprising and courageous temperament, had a covetous desire to possess a bicycle; she envied the people who could go whizzing along in that brave fashion, out to Nairn or on the road to Dores. But she stifled this

desire because of her mother's straitened means; she would not ask for the money; when she saw a bicycle in the distance, she turned away with affectedly indifferent eyes. Then Lily Neile got to know something of this. And Lily Neile had herself been thinking of joining the great bicycle-army; her people were extremely well off, and could have given her twenty bicycles if she had wished for them; and as a point of fact she had already fixed on the machine she meant to buy, with her own money. But as soon as she learnt or guessed Eelin's position, she determined she would not leave her old chum in the lurch. Instantly she swung round. Bicycling was most unfeminine, most unladylike. Did those women know how they were displaying their stockings to any grinning butcher's boy who might pass? And when she and Eelin were out together, it was: "Eelin, look at that girl in the pink blouse: that's an elegant stoop, isn't it?" or "That one has been to the wars; splashed all over her back hair!" "Why can't she keep down her skirts?—she might practice in the garden before making an exhibition of herself," or "If that elderly matron doesn't stop wobbling she'll run into a cab in Church-street and have a fit!" All of which remarks were somehow and secretly intended to console poor Eelin for not having enough money to buy a bicycle.

Meanwhile the tall, white-bearded blind man and his hostess (on whose right hand he sate) had been discussing certain variants of words in the Gaelic tongue and also certain refinements of pronunciation; and into these subjects they at first entered with zest; but by and bye it became clear that old Allan Macdonald was growing inattentive; until at last he gave a chuckle of delight.

"There now, I heard her that time quite plain! Only a couple of words, but quite plain. Madam, may I trouble you to tell me whereabouts she is?"

"Do you mean Eelin?"

"Ay. That indeed."

"She's on the other side of the table from you, and a little bit down. She is sitting between your son Somerled and Mr. Gilchrist." Then of a sudden she thought she would exercise her prerogative as mistress of the feast. "Eelin," she said, to her daughter, "have you no news for Mr. Macdonald? I must not bore him to death with old Gaelic phrases."

Thus appealed to, the girl answered at once and most blithely:

"Oh, but I have though," she said, speaking across the table. "I have excellent news, both for Mr. Macdonald—and for the English-reading peoples of the world! You see, this is how it stands, Mr. Macdonald. Mr. Gilchrist and I wrote a little story. I'm afraid he did most of the writing; but he is generously going to let me share the honour and glory. Well, then, we fell into the hands of an honest and decent magazine-editor, who not only accepted the MS., and fairly and squarely paid for the same, but actually asked for more! It may sound incredible; but blessed are they who have faith; and now comes Mr. Gilchrist, this very evening, with the outline of another story. He ought to tell you that story——"

"No, Eelin, no," said Archie Gilchrist, in an undertone, and blushing furiously.

"Shall I tell it to you, then, ladies and gentlemen," said Eelin, "pledging you to keep it a profound secret?"

There was a murmur of encouragement: she went ahead at once: they little knew what this performance involved:

"We will call the village Marosa. It is in Graubünden, six thousand feet up in the mountains. It is an exceedingly small and remote village; but it is not poor, it is rich, for it is a winter health-resort, and consists chiefly of large hotels, to which wealthy people take their invalids, along with their companions and friends——"

"Like Davos Platz, or St. Moritz," suggested her mamma.

"Davos or St. Moritz! Davos and St. Moritz are like the Alhambra in Leicester Square compared with Marosa——"

"And pray what do you know of the Alhambra in Leicester Square?" demanded the mamma, loftily.

"Will anybody keep order, and let the raconteuse get on?" she retorted. "This little village away up in these heights, has a silence that over-awes you; when you have left the last of the châlets, you get into the lone snow-world and the lonelier pine-woods, and above you are the solitary mountain-peaks, so that you think if you could only get up to the highest of them the next place you must find over you would be the folding doors and white gates of Heaven." She turned to her neighbour on her left. "That's rather fine, isn't it, Archie?" she said in an undertone.

He did not answer; he was too much concerned about the success of this mad experiment; for she was inventing a story out of her own head, with hardly any help from his sketch.

"Ladies and gentlemen," she said, resuming, "I forgot to tell you that this primitive little village hasn't a policeman within twenty miles of it; but at the post-office there is a telegraph to Chur, twenty-two and a half miles off, down in the valley, and also a telephone, and there is another telephone at the Restaurant Zehngebirge. Well, early one morning two gentlemen appear in the empty thoroughfare: they are dressed in an ordinary climbing costume, Norfolk jacket, and knickerbockers; indeed, you might take them for Englishmen only that they don't carry alpenstocks; they have merely a pretty long stick with a triangular bit of steel at the end for jamming down through the snow to make sure there is no hole below. Oh, yes, quite English-looking——"

"Brigands, I'll bet!" said Lily Neile, demurely, over her plate.

"Lily, behave yourself, or you shan't hear any more," said the narrator with a frown, and then she continued: "The two strangers enter the post-office and make themselves very agreeable to the postmaster and his assistant, asking particular questions as to the hour of the arrival of the diligence. The next minute they are behind the counter, each with a revolver in his hand. 'Cut that telegraph!' 'Cut that telephone!' 'If you make the slightest signal you are both dead men.' Reluctantly enough they obey; and then the elder of the two strangers says, in Romansch—Romansch, you know, that awful language that has stolen the unintelligibilities of all other languages and made a rock of bewilderment of them that an ox might break its horns against—'Dalmasso,' he says to the younger man, 'quick—off with you to the Restaurant Zehngebirge—and fire a shot when you have finished. I'll keep watch here.'"

But at this point the narrator stopped.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm awfully sorry to have bored you; I'll tell you the rest another time."

"No, no, why not go on?" pleaded Allan Macdonald: "An old man asks it of you as a favour." The truth is he

did not care one brass farthing about Marosa and its good or evil fortunes; but his ears just hungered for the music of Eelin Macdonald's voice.

"Mr. Gilchrist, perhaps—" she suggested.

"No, no," said Archie Gilchrist. "Do you think I could build it up like that? I gave Miss Eelin the merest skeleton. And she is simply making it live as she goes along: it's wonderful—it's——"

"Very well," said she, contentedly, for perhaps she was as susceptible to praise as most young maidens of twenty. "'Worthy Herr Post-meister,' says the gentleman in grey, 'when you hear that shot fired, you may understand that the village of Marosa is in my hands, and all that it contains. I have captured a village; and the question will then be of indemnity. If the rich people lay down a sufficient sum, perhaps we may depart; if they refuse, then we begin to ransack the hotels. The hotels!' he exclaims, rolling his eyes in ecstacy: 'Herr Gott, was für Plunder! It is now only ten o'clock; you say, the diligence does not arrive till half-past one—oh, but what does that matter?—in any case, if it arrives, we shall simply capture the diligence also. So we have abundance of time to clear the place; and during that time I am Herzog von Marosa, there being no other constituted authority; and for the time being I must see that everything is done properly throughout my Herzogthum. Then we will all go away singing: *Sei mir gegrüsst, Marosa, tausendmal!*' The postmaster replies: 'Illustrious sir, what you threaten is quite absurd. Why, the young men about the hotels, have they no revolvers? They would fall upon you two—you two—gentlemen, and kill you. Or if they were afraid, one of them would have a man galloping down to Chur, to bring the soldiers up ——' 'Ta, ta, ta, worthy Herr Post-meister,' says the stranger, 'are you drilling holes to put an ass's head on me? Chur 22½ miles—45 miles there and back—and the snow in such a condition—how long would it take to send to Chur? Do you consider me a stupid-head with your man on horseback and your soldiers?' At this point a shot is fired outside. 'Do you understand?' the stranger continues. 'My dear Herr Post-meister, Marosa is mine. I have captured it. I can do with it what I like!' 'Perhaps,' says the sullen postmaster, 'but if you

two—gentlemen—go near the Hôtel Schafrücken—where the young Englishmen are, they will kill you with the heavy blocks of wood they whirl about their head.' 'We'll see about that,' says the tall Captain Bartolommeo, and he goes out to call Dalmasso to him."

By this time dinner was over; but their hostess, observing the keen interest with which old Mr. Macdonald was following the story (or rather the sound of Eelin's voice) gave no signal to Lily Neile; so that they all remained listening.

"'Dalmasso,' he says to him, 'which of the hotels first?' 'The biggest of them, master, naturally: the Schafrücken.' 'Very well.' He fires two shots of his pistol into the air; and presently there comes trooping along the snow a gang of some twenty or thirty scoundrels, who must have been skulking somewhere about the road leading to the Furka Pass: swarthy, unshaven, villainous-looking rascals, armed with all kinds of weapons—daggers, knives, pistols, and even antiquated spears; and one of them braying shrill on a cattle-horn—'das Alphorn hört ich drüben wohl anstimmen'! This ragged crew follow their captain up the steps of the Hôtel Schafrücken. The landlord is summoned. He doesn't show fight: for he cannot have the hall of his hotel turned into a shambles, while there are so many delicate ladies in the building. And he refuses to have any part in a common indemnity: he says it would be impossible to induce the other hotels to combine; it would only invite a repetition of such visits until they got a properly-constituted gendarmie. 'But you will pay for this, Bartolommeo,' the landlord says, very angrily no doubt. 'And you Cesare; you think I do not recognise you because you have stained your face, whereas soap and water would have been a better disguise? And you, you one-eyed Demetri—and Carlo—and Lazzaro with the dash down his nose. Gentlemen, come in. Make yourselves at home. But there will be a pretty little settling up when the gendarmes overtake you; and the toss-up will be between a needle through your heart or a snake round your throat.' 'Enough talk,' says the captain of the brigands; and he and about three-fourths of his band go up to the first floor bedrooms, rummaging and raking through the biggest of them, breaking open jewel-boxes, pillaging clothes'-cupboards, and searching the dark corners where

the surprised people had feebly hoped for an asylum for their treasures; carefully packing up the smaller things in cotton wool and chamois leather; and sending the bigger things down to their companions below, who have to prepare them for the sacks carried by the three mules outside. And so they go through one hotel after another, plundering right and left, and not content with sacking jewel-cases, they make any likely-looking person stand to be searched; and this merry game goes on, no one daring to oppose them, until, just as they are about to leave the Kirscherhof, a small girl of twelve or thirteen, a German-looking little girl, with her long flaxen hair plaited a la Margarethe, comes up and stands before the leader of the band. 'Why do you do this?' she demands, 'I hear that the ladies at the Schafrücken are crying—yes, that is because you have taken away all their souvenir jewellery—souvenir rings—souvenir necklets—souvenir studs. By what right do you take away the things that are most valuable to them?' Bartolommeo winks at his right-hand man, Dalmasso. 'Well-born little lady, we are only playing at being robbers. It is only an amusement—do you not understand? To-morrow we will return and bring back all these valuables. And may I ask who is the honourable little lady who speaks so boldly?' 'I am the daughter of the doctor who presides over the Hôtel Schafrücken; and I know if he were here you would not dare to steal these things. It is not good for any one who interferes with the people under my papa's charge. And yonder he is, coming down the road.' The Captain Bartolommeo glances along the highway, and utters an exclamation. 'Little lady—little lady,' he says, hurriedly, 'is your name Hörtli?' 'Yes it is—Agata Hörtli.' 'Mother of God,' cries the brigand to himself, 'what shall I do now? The thrice and four-times blessed doctor, that gave me back my Matta—la mia chera Matta!* But I will not hide from him. I will meet him. I am right willing to be shot, if they will be merciful to my comrades.' The doctor approaches; Bartolommeo steps out and kneels before him in the snow, and he clasps one of the doctor's thickly-gloved hands and kisses it, while there are tears running down his face. 'What is all this, Bartolommeo?' 'Pardon, Highest

* Matta—girl.

Excellency, it would not have happened if I had known you were living here. I thought you were still in Davos, where you gave me my Matta back to life again—la mia bella cherissima Matta, she kisses your name whenever it is mentioned among us. Excellency, what would you have me do?' 'But will you do it?' asks the doctor, severely. 'By all the angels in Heaven, Excellency!' 'Well, you must bring together all those sacks and bags that you have filled, and all the smaller things hidden in pockets, and you must place them in the hall of the Schafrücken, whence they can be returned to their owners, by and bye.' 'My comrades will be terribly disappointed, Excellency,' says Bartolommeo, doubtfully. 'But the Marosa folk are generous,' the doctor says. 'If they find that all their treasures are scrupulously returned, they will get up a consolation fund for your band——' 'And then, Excellency, my comrades must be very hungry after toiling through the snow—' 'They shall have a splendid banquet in less than an hour, and as much Sassella as they can drink—' 'Gott bewahre, Excellency!—that is a soldier's trick; and as yet destiny has not branded me Sciocco across the forehead. If you like, a half-bottle Sassella for each man, and then a little gläschen cognac for the health; but no unlimited wine, Excellency; one or other of them would be sure to take too much, and then he would blab to the neighbours that we were making for the—the—St. Gothard—' The doctor bursts out laughing. 'Bartolommeo, you do not think Dummkopf is branded across my forehead either? The St. Gothard?—more likely the Splügen—hey?' 'Your Excellency will not send the soldiers after us?' 'The soldiers have not been summoned, for a very excellent reason; but if they should arrive, they will not get many particulars of your way of departure—that is to say, if all those valuables are accurately restored.' 'It shall be one, Excellency. Bartolommeo swears it, by the twenty-four angels that guard the throne of Mary the Mother of God!'"

Eelin paused for a second.

"I suppose that is the end," said she; "but it is probable that the people of Marosa—especially the hotel-visitors—who had been rejoiced beyond measure at getting back all their jewellery, and souvenir-presents, and finery—it is

probable they had been extraordinarily lavish in their subscriptions to the fund; for it is said that more than one of the band, as they turned the corner leading to the Furka (this was a blind, of course) looked back at the scattered hotels among the snow and sang aloud

'Sei mir gegrüsst, Marosa, tausend-mal!'"

Here the hostess caught Lily Neile's eye, and all rose to make way for the ladies' departure. But Archie Gilchrist, whose frame was all tingling and trembling with excitement, made bold to call a halt.

"One moment, ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you something. I want to explain to you that you have been listening to what you never heard before and will probably never hear again—a true improvisation. Don't you believe that I gave that story to Miss Macdonald. I only gave her the slightest suggestion—a rude outline—and she took it up, and invented characters, places, names, incidents just as she came along and wanted them. Why there was no doctor or doctor's daughter in the outline I gave her! I say it is marvellous. She never halted for a second; you would have thought she had known these people and their surroundings all her life. That is improvisation; it is a rare quality."

"Why, Mummie, what have I told you?" said Eelin, lightly enough, when the three ladies were passing into the hall. "I've always told you I was a tremendous genius!"

"Dearest, it's too great a strain," the mother said, anxiously. "You must not do that often. It's all very well while you're at your desk, and writing the thing out, with any leisure you may choose to take; but to force your brain—and before a lot of guests—"

Indeed, Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave looked rather pale and tired when she took her seat in the drawing-room; and when the gentlemen came in—which they did almost immediately, for there was not amongst them any unspeakable cub capable of smoking in the dining-room of a ladies' house—the murmured conversation was not prolonged. Then when Lily Neile's brougham and Mr. Macdonald's cab were announced, and when Mr. Macdonald had offered

to drive Archie Gilchrist into the town, and when they had all gone away, perhaps the improvisatrice, unused to such sustained efforts, felt some little sensation of relief. But as far as Archie Gilchrist was concerned, the adventures of thatnight were not yet over.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GREEN WOMAN.

When the carriage stopped at the door of the Caledonian Hotel, Somerled Macdonald handed over his father to the guardianship of old Angus, who had been waiting for him, and then turned to Archie Gilchrist.

"Gilchrist," said he—"but I beg your pardon; we are used to talking *tout court* out there in the west; won't you come to my room and have a cigar and a whisky-and-soda: there are one or two things of some importance—of great importance—I want to speak to you about."

Gilchrist at once assented, and his host led the way to a large sitting-room. He went to the fireplace, and rang the bell; and the waiter was bidden to go and fetch certain things—which were chiefly an excuse for the interview.

"Now, Mr. Gilchrist," said the young railway-king, "I want to ask you very bluntly and directly: I hope you won't take it ill; so much depends on your answer; and now I want to ask you fair and straight—is there any relationship between you and Miss Eelin Macdonald?"

At this Archie Gilchrist's back got very stiff and obdurate.

"Really, Mr. Macdonald, you must see for yourself that this is a most extraordinary question——"

"Man! man! don't take it that way!" the other implored—and the grave, refined, and thoughtful face was for a second full of a vague entreaty. "If you only knew the reasons why I ask, you would not hesitate—"

"Then show me your reasons, and I can judge whether I ought to give you an answer!"

For an instant a flash of fire shot out from the deep, steady, brown eyes. The railway-pioneer was not used to be

quibbled with in this fashion. But he had a strong will, and a strong command over himself. He showed no symptoms of annoyance ; and as the waiter at this moment entered, there was perforce a short period of peace.

"Well, well," continued Somerled Macdonald, blithely, as soon as the waiter had gone. "We must begin some other way. I suppose, now, you wouldn't object to tell me if all those things they say about Lord Mountmahon are true ?"

"About Lord Mountmahon ? Well, that also would be difficult," said Gilchrist, who turned out to have much more of caution and firmness than the quick, questioning, authoritative Somerled Macdonald had expected. "I should not like to guarantee the authenticity of all the wild stories that have been attached to his name since he came to the Glengarva district——"

"Your own opinion of him, then !" Somerled said, impatiently. He spoke as one used to being obeyed.

"My own opinion of him ? My own opinion of Lord Mountmahon ?" said Gilchrist, with his grey eyes glittering a little. "Physically I should say he was like an undersized, overfed bibulous ostler, mentally I should imagine his ideal of Heaven was a music hall, ablaze with electric light, and stuffed full of cocktails."

"I perceive that we are in line in that direction, at all events," young Macdonald said, slowly. And then again he went on : "And mind you, what I think of him is not based solely on hearsay. I have seen Mountmahon and that hellicate crew of his, after a champagne carousal of a breakfast, just outside the doors of Kinvaig House—Kinvaig House !—on a quiet Sabbath morning—I have seen them burst into a floundering, staggering Maelstrom of a dance, the men yelling and roaring, the women kicking their skirts as high as their head. A Sabbath morning, in Glengarva ! And this is the man they say is to marry Eelin Macdonald, the last representative of the House of Kinvaig !"

"But he has not married her yet," said Archie Gilchrist.

"No, nor by God shall he ever, while I am alive," responded the Canadian Highlander, in a low voice, with his features grown very pale. Indeed, he seemed extraordinarily agitated—he who usually was so calm, and self-centred, and

tranquil of gaze. He walked up and down in his perturbation; when he stopped for a moment to utter one or two of his thrilling sentences, the hand that grasped the chair-back trembled and shook. "Why, man, you don't understand the circumstances at all! You people born in the towns of the north-eastern coasts of Scotland are only one sixth part Highland or one twentieth part; and when the story is bruited about that Lord Mountmahon is going to marry Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig, they will only say 'A good match, that!' But when the people in the West Highlands —the people among the hills, and the corries, and along the loch-sides—when they hear that the Last Daughter of the House of Kinvaig—'Eelin with the eyes like the blue seawave' I am told that is what they call her, in their pride of her and their love of her, when they hear that she is to be disgraced and degraded by submitting to a marriage with this notorious blackguard, there will be many a wild and indignant heart beating throughout the glens of Inverness, and Argyll, and the Isles."

"There ought to be some way of preventing such a desecration," said Archie Gilchrist, "and I think there is, supposing all were to turn out well. Now, Mr. Macdonald——"

"I was born a Macdonald, but not a Mr.," the other interposed, gently.

"As you will. But if you were to give me your word of honour, now, not to reveal the secret, I could tell you something that would make this situation a good deal clearer, and hopefuller."

"I give you my word, then."

"Your word of honour?"

"Is there any difference?" said Somerled Macdonald, haughtily: "I give you my personal assurance: there is enough of honour goes with that?"

Gilchrist yielded at once. The other man was too strong for him, even when it came to be a mere question of phrase.

"Well, I will trust you. Eelin Macdonald and I are engaged to be married," said Archie Gilchrist, watching his companion, who for a minute or so did not utter a word. "Yes," continued Gilchrist, with some anxious air of culpability, "you may well look surprised. And yet it was not altogether impertinence on my part that brought about a crisis. There may have been mischance; but not

impertinence—you would not think there could be any impertinence on my part that brought about a crisis,—surely you won't believe that?"

"I do not," was the decisive answer.

"I hardly understand how it all came about," Gilchrist continued. "I think it was more of a literary companionship that she had in her mind——"

"But ending in marriage?" Macdonald exclaimed: his great, flaming eyes intent.

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Gilchrist. "That is the usual climax, no doubt, if all things go well. We did not talk much of marriage, I confess, nor of anything else, I believe: the witchcraft of the moonlit night kept us to silence mostly. And indeed I had no wish to speak; I had gained so much by my mad presumption; and then everything was so vague and distant; and who knows even now what may happen in the meanwhile? Influences one does not suspect at present might be brought to bear on her mother——"

"Has Eelin Macdonald given you her promise that sometime she will marry you?" asked his companion, his eyes fixed on the hearthrug.

"Yes. I know no reason why I should deny it."

"And do you understand what those lines about her mouth, especially the under lip—do you understand what those lines mean?"

"They are very beautiful, at all events, and proud, and gentle: as much as that every one can see."

"They mean more than that," said Somerled Macdonald. "They mean that she would have her hands hewn from her wrists before she would be forced to retract a promise given to her lover——"

At the word "lover" Gilchrist started slightly. It was all true, then? That singular relationship was not wholly confined to hushed homeward-going talks about 'The eve of St. Agnes,' while the wild red heavens laid breadths of a gentler fire here and there on the steel-grey bosom of the stream?

"Perhaps so," responded Gilchrist, who seemed strangely depressed and downhearted this evening. "She has courage enough for anything. But then on the other hand, she is extraordinarily sensitive; and if outlying relatives or friends

were in the end to persuade her that she was doing an injury to the history of her family and race if she married a man who only the other day was a clerk in a hosier's shop, well, might she not bring that very courage to bear in tearing the contract asunder——"

"And then, you suppose, the fat little peer would come sailing in?" rejoined young Macdonald, with his calm, steady, observant eyes. "Is that what is floating before your imagination?"

"Well," said Gilchrist, in a vague kind of way. "Mountmahon boasts everywhere that he can always get what he wants—it's a common phrase of his, I've been told."

"It is a vile phrase, a very bad and vile phrase; it leads you so often into the quagmires of mortification," observed Somerled, with a philosophic air; but he was clearly thinking of something else, for presently he said to his guest: "Gilchrist, for goodness' sake help yourself to these things on the tray—and—and please excuse me for a couple of seconds. I shall not be leaving the room: I only want a few minutes to consider a scheme I have before me."

And then he crossed to the window, and sate down in a corner chair, and drew towards him the Venetian blind, so that he could look out on the almost empty pavement, the dull orange gas-lamps and the dark fronts of the opposite houses, while from any inmate of the room he was quite concealed. He remained a good deal longer than the stipulated time, his clinched fists resting on the window-sill, his features, usually contemplative and dispassionate, now overgoverned by a determined and haggard resignation. When he dropped the blind and returned into the middle of the parlour, he was full of excuses for his protracted absence; and then he said, in an off-hand way, as he took a cigar and lit it—

"Look here, Gilchrist, tell me this: I suppose the Editor of the Invernish *Observer* is rather a person of distinction in this town?"

"Oh, yes, oh, certainly," was the indifferent reply; it was not of the good Doctor Gillespie that Archie Gilchrist was thinking at this moment.

"He would be considered to hold a good position—one of a certain dignity and power?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"And if he were of a literary turn—perhaps had done some literary work off his own bat—wouldn't one of the Universities be almost certain to give him an honorary degree—what do you think?"

"I think that would be highly probable. Dr. Gillespie, the present proprietor and editor, is an LL.D. of Glasgow, and his predecessor, Dr. Rennie, got his D.C.L. from Durham."

"But in any case, what I mean is, he would take an assured position, in ordinary society—one might make sure of that?"

"Oh, certainly," Archie Gilchrist answered.

"And if there were a public dinner, for example," said young Macdonald, with his still observant eyes fixed on his companion, "he would be a man to be marked—he would have a place of honour——"

"Oh, yes, yes, decidedly; everybody is anxious to be friends with the Doctor, whether for their own ends or not, I will not say."

"And even if the editor did not all at once arrive at the honorary degree, he would still be a person of consequence in the town?"

"Undoubtedly," Gilchrist repeated. "If it has any interest for you——"

"Indeed, it has the greatest possible interest for me," said Macdonald, with a peculiar look in his face which Gilchrist did not notice.

"Well, then," said guest to host, "I may explain to you that the Invernish *Observer* appeals to many interests and many classes; it has summaries of general reports for the Outer Isles; and local agricultural reports, and reports of town meetings; but above all there is the literary element that Dr. Gillespie has given such prominence to, and all over the North of Scotland the Invernish *Observer* has a clientèle on that score alone."

"Ay, the literary element—the literary element: it's a wonderful thing that for bridging over gaps in the social grades," continued young Macdonald, in a meditative fashion. "This very evening, out at Glengarva House there, I was saying to myself 'How openly and proudly she shows her favour; and yet Gilchrist does not in the

least presume on it; it's an equality that comes from their literary partnership, that mysterious communion.' And then again I was uncertain. She is a merry lass, I am told. She likes to play tricks—but not that kind of tricks, they say: she is too proud. However, the situation as you now set it forth is simple enough; and I have sworn an oath that Eelin Macdonald shall not marry this swine of a creature, herself being unwilling, nor shall she be forced to consort with his abominable companions. You may say it is none of my business. And perhaps it is none of my business. But I mean to make it of my business."

Shortly thereafter Gilchrist took his leave; and as soon as he was gone Somerled turned off the gases in this room, drew in an arm-chair to the fire, stretched himself out at full length, and, with feet on the fender, resumed his musings: "A strange chap, that: virile, shrewd, capable in many things; and in other things a mere child, an infant in the ways of the world, a spinner of dreams. The literary world, I suppose, the phantom-world, the world where people speak as equals, and that is why Wild Eelin permitted him the preposterous impudence of proposing to her. Well, she has made her choice; and that is enough for the rest of us; one must do what one can; and when I felt the pang of renunciation—that terrible minute behind the Venetian blind—God knows it was not about the handing over of so many thousands of pounds that one was thinking: surely not that; surely not that! But if the proud daughter of such a famous house should stoop to a perfectly insignificant person, then why might she not have done so to me? Had I missed my chance by going away back to Canada at the wrong time, leaving for myself nothing but the remainder of a broken life? That was a ghastly thing to think of; but it was only for a moment; a fancy so insolent, so unabashed, so monstrous, could only last for a moment. How could I have, without any encouragement—of which there was not a trace—how could I have dared to lift my eyes to such a height?

"As for this rotund rake-hell, this fat booby Mountmahon—bah! A tap on the nose, and then he'd be bound to suggest a little trip to Calais sands; and there I'd spit him like a haggis; for I can do it; and it's an unholy size

of a haggis he would make. But if he should insist on fisticuffs, I'm not so sure then; for they say he's rather clever with his fists. However one can only do one's best; for the main thing is to get this young newspaper-fellow into a settled and honourable and distinguished position; and to get the mother placated; and the daughter of the House of Kinvaig settled down with a happy marriage."

And so he dozed and dreamed, watching the leaping flames of red and living yellow; and gazing down the twisted little corridors of gleaming gold and black-bound fire; until he heard, or seemed to hear, just behind him a voice which said or apparently said to him 'What thou art thinking of doing, that must thou do.' He turned, naturally and simply enough, for he was not a man to be easily scared, and found before him a woman—a tall woman with an old-fashioned dress in dark tartan, a large silver clasp fastening the folds in front, and with a Glengarva bonnet on her head, worn somewhat to one side, and ornamented on the other with a cairngorm brooch. The colour of this apparition, from head to foot, was the coarse bright light of a green railway-lamp gone dim; and momentarily it appeared to be growing more and more pale; until with the determined concentration of his strong and steady eyes he could just make out through the phantom the white lace and the damask curtains and the Venetian blinds of the corner in which he had recently been sitting. And yet the green spectre did not wholly disappear. He grew impatient. At the end of a couple of seconds, he pressed thumb and third finger into ear and eye; and pressed them firmly; and after a minute or so he released the pressure, and shook his head, and looked around. The wraith had completely vanished.

He opened the door of the next room, which was his bedroom, and proceeded to undress. He was not in the least perturbed; on the contrary he was carelessly saying to himself: "When both ear and eye are deceived at the same time, it shows that the brain disturbance is considerable, and I should think in this case it was caused by devoting the mind too unintermittently towards a single object. But this one object, whatever it costs—whatever it costs, by God, for I have sworn that—must be accomplished; and then the

*Bean-uaine** and *Iseabel Bheag nan Brecaig*† may wander away by themselves through the twilit woods, chasing the new moon. And as for the Green Woman, she was a remarkably sensible phantasm, when she only warned me to follow the course I had already decided upon."

* The Green Woman. † Little Isabel of the Bannocks.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUTSIDE THE LAW.

EARLY on the following afternoon Eelin's half-secreted summer-house in among the shadowy foliage had been taken possession of by two bold swash bucklers—two swaggering young braggarts they seemed to be—who wore a military costume or something pretending to be a military costume. White it was for the most part, though there was a peripheral binding of red silk; white linen it was, thickly padded across the chest, the lapel taken tightly over to the left shoulder, where it joined the row of gold buttons which went in a sinuous row from the waist to the collar. Under this short-skirted coat were a pair of loose knickerbockers, with hosen of ruddy-brown homespun wool, smooth and soft, and showing the outline of the leg and ankle; and finally came a pair of dainty shoes, chiefly consisting of two or three narrow bands of scarlet morocco, buckled over to a sole of crimson felt. A heap of warlike articles lay about —short swords, foils, masks, gauntlets, and so forth; and a basin of water had been brought, lest anyone should want medical treatment. Gay gallants they were, and perfect in all matters of equipment and demeanour; there was only one doubtful circumstance; any stranger drawing near to the delicate rose-tints and the velvet down of those finely modelled cheeks might well have doubted whether they had ever been caressed by a razor.

Meanwhile Wild Eelin had outstripped her companion in these preparations; and she had seated herself at her harp, and there was a soft and careless tinkling of notes, while

half-heard even by herself she was singing some fragments of an old nursery ballad—

> "And where's the ring that I gied ye,
> That I gied ye, that I gied ye,
> And where's the ring that I gied ye,
> Ye little cutty-quean, O?
> I gied it till a soger,
> A soger, a soger,
> I gied it till a soger,
> A true sweetheart o' mine, O!"

Then she rose from her seat, and with a snap-shot half-bashful glance at the smooth-fitting hosen and the neatness of the scarlet-morocco toes, she said—

"Look here, Lily Neile, this is the most horrid wastry and extravagance! We could have gone on well enough with the old things. You can't improve your *riposte* by buying new gauntlets and masks—"

"My dear child, I wish you wouldn't bleth!" said the other. She seemed to be a little peevish and disconcerted through sundry long hairs belonging to her moustache that would keep tickling her about the lips and also intercepting her speech. "The expense has been very little this time; and look what we should save if we were invited to a Fancy Dress Ball. A little alteration; and you could be anything! The Corsican Brothers, for example. There you are; right off the reel. Of course we should have a long white cloak to match, for the arrival and the assembly; a scarlet collar, if you like; and your rapier must stick out a good bit behind, you know, to break the falling line, and keep you distinguished from the crowd—"

> "'Stand about, ye fisher jauds,
> And gie my gown room!'"

cried Eelin, jeeringly.

"Ah, but there's more than that," said Lily Neile, nothing daunted. "For I've got a theory—"

"Oh, don't theo, Lily, there's a darling!" said Eelin, in a pleading voice. "It always does take such a time!"

"Stuff!" contended the other. "Now listen to me. You never do anything well unless you are dressed, and well dressed, for the part. Costume has a tremendous influence. You are bound to act up to it." Lily Neile was struggling hard to give a proper twist to her moustache.

She continued: "I tell you, you can't play your part without having dressed for it, up to the last feather-touch. If you want to be in good form, be in good uniform. . ." She turned from the glass. "Aren't you ready yet?" she said, impatiently.

"I've been waiting for you and your blessed finicking for the last twenty minutes," said Eelin, complacently—for she was a goodnatured girl—"and the result of your finicking is that you've got that precious moustache of yours twisted on one side; and your feints and your lunges will all be hard down to starboard."

Now the southern boundary of the Glengarva House grounds consists of a stone wall and a still higher hedge that separate the tennis-lawn and the various gardens from the open meadows beyond; while at the south-east corner there is a magnificent cedar-tree with a space behind it which can on occasion be made a perfect asylum for certain runagates. And as Eelin and her chief chum had managed to convey to old Maxwell's assistant, along with a casual sixpence or two, that he needn't be too zealous in brushing away the needles shed by the cedar, there was here an excellent refuge for them, and a soft falling-ground, when they were wrestling, or boxing with padded gloves, or flinging Indian clubs about their head. Not that there was an absolute certainty of their escaping observation on their way from the summer-house to the cedar; for even now, as they crept up by the black-green araucaria (moreover they had dark cloaks over their more brilliant attire) Mrs. Macdonald, who was seated on one of the garden benches, glanced up from her wood-carving, and called to them—

"What are you wretches after now?"

But they signalled to her to be quiet, and the next minute they were safely between the great cedar-tree and the stone wall and the hedge. There certainly was a little risk of espyal, even here in this secret corner, for just outside the wall and the hedge was the swing-wicket through which the rare pedestrian had to pass in walking along by the river; but it is to be noted that people going through a revolving-wicket generally give their whole attention to the ground, lest there should be a puddle there.

And so, having flung their cloaks on to the hedge, they

put on their masks, and began trying their foils, and making passes at imaginary antagonists; until they were called to order by one of themselves; then they got into position, they exchanged courtesies, and with an 'Allez, mesdemoiselles!' the assault had begun: with cautious approach—with swift feint and lunge and parry—and with an occasional ring on the cup-hilt of the foil. It was a picturesque combat—the white and scarlet figures under the dim shadow of the cedar; but it was easy to see how it must end. Eelin Macdonald was simply dashing herself against the far more scientific guard of her opponent; her brilliant onslaughts (not unpractised either) Lily Neile quietly put aside, remaining on the defensive until her chance came for a lightning-like thrust. Then came the inevitable:

"A touch," Eelin said with resignation.

"No, I think not!"

"Yes, yes, undoubtedly," and by this time both foils were lowered, to give a few minutes' breathing, and to let Eelin crowd up again the disarranged masses of her shining black hair.

"Twenty thousand hair pins will never do this for me!" she said, disconsolately.

"Come, come," said Lily Neile, "we must show our ghostly audience, if we have one, that we can do something."

And soon they were at it again—Eelin hurling herself impetuously against her enemy, caring less about her own guard than about getting through that skilful defence on the other side; and, of course, she couldn't and she didn't; and at last came a little cry.

"Yes, yes, this time, Lil."

Eelin's left hand that had been high in air behind her came slowly down to her heart; for a second the right hand seemed to rest on her lowered foil; then the weapon fell away from her inert fingers, and, after a moment's wavering, she went heavily to the ground. Fortunately, Lily Neile had sense enough not to shriek aloud; but instantly she was down by the side of her friend, with her arms around her shoulders, trying to lift her up.

"Eelin!" she cried. "What is it? I'm sure I did not hit you—only a scratch—only a scratch—let me lift you up and you'll see there isn't a sign of the button

—It cannot have done anything more than graze your sleeve——"

But Wild Eelin gave neither word nor sign. She lay prone, as if with her arms enclasping some deadly hurt; and Lily Neile, with a shuddering dread, asked herself if she must now run to Mrs. Macdonald, to get help towards carrying the wounded girl into the house. At the same moment one of Eelin's dark blue eyes began to open a little bit—the most tiny little bit; the long black lashes parted the least thing further; the clear deeps thus divulged were full of something, but somehow that something was neither piteous pain, nor yet appeal, nor yet reproach; all at once the conviction flashed upon Lily Neile that Eelin Macdonald was simply convulsed with laughter, and on the point of becoming fragmentary in her efforts to suppress the same."

"Oh, you—you—you—" but in her indignation she could not find a suitable word—"you treacherous cow-herd! —to give me pangs of agony all for nothing! Well, if I'm not mistaken, the punishment has fallen upon you—and unfortunately on me too; for I caught a glimpse of a carriage—a yellow barouche, I think it was, going up the drive; there are visitors; and whether we cut round by the back premises, or make a run for the hall, we shall be seen either way; the consequence is that we are shut up in this hole until the honourable callers shall have taken themselves off. Q.E.D."

"Lil," said Wild Eelin, frantically—for imprisonment of any kind always seemed to choke her—"on with your cloak, and we'll skip round by the holly-hedge, and in by the kitchen stairs."

"Don't you know your own house, then!" exclaimed her companion. "Whether you cross the lawn or go round by the araucaria, some of the drawing-room windows are sure to catch you; and the most likely thing of all is that Jane is at this very moment bringing your visitors out to see your mamma; and of course they'll stay to tea; and of course we shall be boxed up here until they think fit to leave."

"No, no," said Eelin, hurriedly and plaintively, "that won't do at all. We must go straight up to them, and say—and say—what can we say? Lil, what can we say? —that we have been—that we have been—what can we

say? Lily Neile, you're no good at a lie! Well, what is it?"

For she had been suddenly grasped by the arm; and she found that her companion was staring towards the drawing-room French windows, that had just been opened by one of the maids to allow Lord Mountmahon to descend to the surrounding greensward. The two young ladies knew that this time they were thoroughly entrapped; and not only so but that they were bound to hear every word that was said, for the afternoon was singularly noiseless and still. Eelin pulled the collar of her dark cloak well round her chin; and gazed idly at the faint blue hills far down in the south; and tried to persuade herself that she did not exist.

But the very first words that Mountmahon uttered startled her into attention.

"You know, Mrs. Macdonald," he said, with a certain sullenness of tone, "I think I have fair right to complain of the treatment I have received from both your daughter and you. That's the truth; and there's no disguising it. I'm a plain man; and I like to speak plain; and I say I consider I have not been treated well. Done everything I could think of to please you—by Gad, I have—sparing nothing—leaving the shoot—and letting those fellows blaze away my cartridges and spoil the dogs—trying everything—railway-engines, now—my goodness, do you know what's the cost of a brace of railway-engines?—I'll bet you don't! And all the return I get is glum looks and 'Please keep off the grass.' Well, I'm tired of being told to keep off the grass. When I drive up to this house: 'Is Mrs. Macdonald at home?' 'No, my lord.' 'Is Miss Macdonald at home?' 'No, my lord': the whole of you scurrying off like rabbits into holes. What have I done to deserve such treatment? I know the common talk about me; and I know where it is made up. Do you get your information then, from the servants' hall? Is your opinion of me gathered from the scullery? Refined ladies, who ought to set an example to commoner folk, do they consult the gossip of the ale-houses and the byres?"

He was drunk, of course; but the Bean-an-Tighearn did not understand that; she merely rose, and retired a step from him, her eyes fixed on the ground, while her complexion was white where it should have been pink and pink where it should have been white.

"My lord," she said, not without dignity, "I wish to ask only one favour from you; and that is the seclusion of my own house. I am not accustomed to hearing such language; there was a time when none would have dared to use it, to me or mine; but we have no man of our family with us now, and we are helpless——"

A passionate little cry came from behind the cedar-branches, and if anyone had happened to look thither some sign of scuffle might have been discerned. For on hearing her mother insulted—along with the pathetic confession that now there was no man to protect the ladies of the House of Kinvaig—Eelin had quickly unscrewed the button from the end of her foil, and was springing out into the open—regardless of any consequences—when Lily Neile caught her and bound her, and dragged her back into the thicket.

"Eelin, are you mad!"

"Is my mother to be insulted?" was the instant retort.

"To have such a thing in the newspapers—to have your mother's name in the newspapers—coupled with that of Lord Mountmahon—and perhaps a charge of manslaughter. That would be a pretty tale to tell! Drop that foil! Can't you see the beast's drunk?—and we'll just have to wait until he goes away."

But there was help coming from an unexpected quarter. For his lordship, moved by a deep sense of personal injury, had begun to rail and rate again like a Newhaven fishwife carrying her husband home; and the Bean-an-Tighearn, her first brave show of courage over, had quite succumbed, and had sunk on the garden-seat, endeavouring to stifle and conceal her tears. Who, then, was this but Morag the Mull lass, who came rather late upon the scene; but when she saw and understood what was before her, and when she had been told that Jane had been sent off into Invernish for a policeman, with very little chance of intercepting one at that time of the day, Morag did not wait for orders. She strode across the space of lawn. Her small dark-brown eyes had a sullen fire in them; her face was the colour of a pæony; she was breathing hard; and there was a dangerous politeness in her Highland tongue.

"And were you saying any things to my mistress, sir?" asked Morag. "And now maybe you will say them to me; maybe I will be better able to answer them—"

"Oh, go away, you fool!" he said, curtly.

The next thing that happened was unexpected. Before he knew where he was, Morag had got one of her fists implanted under his ear, gripping both coat and collar, and she was dragging him across the lawn to the drive. It was of no use his struggling and twisting, nor yet his threatening and vowing of vengeance; the muscles of this blazing-red freckled lass were as the muscles of a Highland stot; if he escaped throttling altogether it was the best that could be hoped for him.

"Is't yours that yellow cab?" said Morag, with the genuine Mull of Ross accent. "Well, come aweh, now, and we'll chist put you into it—and cannily, cannily, my braw mannikin—we are not wishing you to remain here at ahl."

What occurred now requires some little preliminary explanation. Glengarva House, like most of the houses in that district, has its kitchen and other underground premises more or less illumined by a series of separate windows, each of which has its own shaft for letting down the light of day. Again, each of these holes is capable on occasion of making an excellent man-trap; for there is neither fence nor rail around the top; while after a slope of greensward some few feet in breadth, there comes a sudden descent into a perpendicular prison about six feet in depth, and about five in diameter, while the window behind is strongly barred. Accordingly, when Lord Mountmahon, rendered furious by the ignominy of his position, had determined above all that he would not be seen by his coachman and footman in the hands of this virago, when his lordship was making the most frantic efforts to shake himself free from this woman's inexorable clutch, he had no knowledge that both he and she were approaching one of these treacherous apertures. The next moment both of them got too near the edge, their feet seemed to fall away from them, they both slipped down the stretch of greensward, but while Morag clung on to her mother earth as with the claws of a wild cat, Mountmahon went trundling into the lower portion of his oubliette, where he found himself surrounded by a neat little vertical dungeon of stone. And curses are of no avail when a cell has no door to it.

Meanwhile the red-headed Morag had scrambled up into the open air again; and much surprised was she to find the

grounds surrounding Glengarva House apparently empty; then she suspected that the young ladies had taken Mrs. Macdonald away to her own apartments; and in this conclusion she was joined by the parlour-maid Jane, who now came running back.

"Morag," she said, in great alarm, for this Jane was a nice, quiet, peaceable Scotch lassie, not used to such wild tilly-tantrums—"I canna see a policeman anywhere aboot; and we maunna have the mistress spoken to that gate. Where's—where's his lordship?"

Morag began to giggle; then she began to giggle more and more, and as if she were holding herself tight so as not to explode with laughter. She pointed to the aperture leading from the sward.

Then there was another volley of cursing.

"Dearie me!" said the douce Jane. "Well, we must get him out."

"I'm sure I've nae preen* big enough to get out that wilk,†" said Morag: she seemed quite content to let things be; there was a kind of obscure merriment in the whole situation: why should she budge?

"Maxwell, then?" suggested Jane.

"Oh, who ever can find Maxwell!" said Morag, contemptuously. "How is it possible, when he is for ever bummin around the universe in the body of David Haggart, the murderer?"

"The coachman, then, and the footman—his lordship's own servants?" was the next proposition.

"I am not used to speaking to any such great people," returned Morag, coldly: the truth is, his lordship had severely scratched several of her fingers; and she was in pain and extremely angry; and she did not care how long he was kept, at intervals bawling and yelling, in that stone cage. However, at last, amongst the lot of them, they managed to get Mountmahon hauled into the upper world, and conveyed to his barouche, the hood of which was discreetly pulled down. The footman awaited orders.

"Hotel—at once!"

"Which hotel, if your lordship pleases," was the reply of the deeply agitated person with the powdered hair; there were generally kicks flying about, and also sudden dismissals,

* *Preen—pin.* † *Wilk—whelk, periwinkle.*

when his lordship got into any of these entanglements. "Your lordship will remember there was a little fracas—about six o'clock this morning—"

"Oh, any hotel!" Mountmahon cried, as he flung himself into a corner of the vehicle. "What I want is writing materials—do you hear—paper, pens, and ink—at once—do you understand. Do you understand, you blockhead?"

"Yes, your lordship."

"Gracious heavens, what have I done this time?" Mountmahon muttered to himself, as they drove off—for the wine had now had time to work, and he was getting into a more and more bemused condition. Nevertheless he was haunted by certain dark and unnerving recollections. "Yes, I have—no mistake—I have done it," he maundered on. "I have insulted a lady—by Gad, it's true—one of the oldest families in the Highlands—insulted her before the servants—lost my chance with the famous beauty—not one within a hundred thousand miles of her at the Northern Games. I knew it was bad champagne—and I'll say so whether it's six o'clock in the morning or no—and I knew I should get into trouble with their vile muck. Never mind: let's stick to our guns, Mounty: never say die—and that's my motto. Not done for yet. Wait till I get that writing-paper, and the apology I'll offer will be about six inches thick. Oh, twenty apologies! I'll go on my knees —d——d if I don't! Too much to lose—too much at stake. Paulus must get me a stiff B. and S.—a devilish stiff B. and S.; and I'll go for something that will melt a heart of flint. I'll crawl on my hands and knees, that's what I'll do. A d——d shame it was. If there's a gentlewoman in this country it's that one; and I know what I was when I gave her damson-pie; for if I know what she is, I know what I am; and there's not a d——d cad in all this d——d country would have done such a d——d cowardly thing. Well, well, a devilish stiff peg, and writing-paper and ink, and we'll have a try yet. There's nothing they can dictate but I'll subscribe to; apologies fifteen feet thick; I'll swim in 'em till I can get ashore; and then I'll crawl on my hands and knees, like a retriever bringing a snipe out of a bog. If it was the mother, I think I could manage; but the young one she frightens me—staring at you like a bull across a gate. But you've got to pull yourself

together, Mounty. Oh, don't you fear; you're fit enough and going strong; you'll be at the post! A stiff B. and S. and some ink and writing-paper; and the old lady will soon get smoothed over. As for the young lioness—well, we mustn't try to stroke her for the present, if anyone has been so extremely unkind as to tell her the story——"

And with that he tumbled over on the other side, and was asleep even before they got near the town.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PURCHASER.

THERE were the makings of a spate about. All night long the rain was heard in the trees; the sound of the weir rose and fell with the gusts that came moaning up from the hills in the south; daylight showed that the already swollen river had been steadily rising in volume, until now it was sweeping along in full flood, with twigs, leaves, branches, and bits of strayed timber racing and chasing and marking the swiftness of the black current. The hill-country was shut away from sight by lowering mists; the woodlands were steeped in vapour; the roads were running red; and the drooping limes and maples had no life left in them—they did not seem to be making any fight against this constant downpour of rain, and rain, and rain.

It was an excellent morning for any one with indoor work to do, for example. Eelin at an early hour was bending her wave-blue eyes over the arrears of that literary co-partnership to which she loyally and assiduously adhered, though occasionally, for mischief's sake, she would rise from her chair and pace up and down her room, inventing taunts and jeers with which to lash that fell traitor 'Fairfax'; but it was a morning not so pleasant for any one apparently having nothing at all to do but walk about the wet streets of Invernish, staring into the fishmongers' shops. However, this stranger was well enough protected from the rain by a pair of angler's boots and a long waterproof; while the firm outline and the sun-tan of his face seemed to say that he was not likely to pay much attention to the weather, in any case. And so he continued his idle perambulations; the calm brown eyes perhaps more absent than their wont,

the fine and firm and thoughtful features apparently occupied by problems while the rain fell unnoticed.

And then once more he went round to the *Observer* office, and asked for Mr. Gilchrist.

"Any news yet of the Doctor?"

"None," the flaxen-haired sub-editor made answer. "We have telephoned everywhere—not a trace of him. Must have been swept into the sea, I should imagine——"

"It is impossible he could have gone away out to the links in this weather!" was the next inquiry.

"One would think so, unless he has gone headlong daft about that golfing of his—and sometimes it looks like it."

"But what do they say at his own house?"

"Oh, they won't say anything!" answered Archie Gilchrist, lightly (little did he know how deeply he and his fortunes were involved in these transactions). "We have rung them up again and again; and once or twice they did answer; but now they pay no heed."

"That's where he is, then," said Somerled Macdonald, with decision. "Tell me how I am to find this View Mount —that's the name, isn't it?—and see if I don't get hold of your mad Doctor!"

Furnished with the necessary information, he left the office, and made his way up the steep streets leading from the sorely-bedraggled town, and found himself following this or the other spacious highway adorned on each side with large and handsome villas set amid spacious gardens. Nor had he much difficulty in discovering the particular house he was in quest of; and with a quick glance round to block any escape, he boldly went up the front steps and rang the bell. If this mysterious and fugacious Doctor were anywhere at home, Somerled thought he had made sure of him this time, the heavy rain assisting.

There came to answer the summons a most extraordinary-looking creature—a lad or a man who might have been anything between fourteen and four-and-twenty; his head, too big for his body, resembling a gargoyle; but his eyes keen and sharp enough notwithstanding the general cowering of his expression.

"Is Dr. Gillespie at home?" demanded Somerled Macdonald, with a touch of his authoritative way.

"N—no," answered the caddie, who had been brought

in from the links to lend a helping hand in the house, and who was not yet skilled in the art of plausible domestic lying.

"When will he be at home, then?" Somerled asked.

"No the day," mumbled the uncouth phenomenon.

"Oh, that is quite absurd!" the railway-king said, impatiently. "Not at the links; not at his office; not in his own home; will answer neither telephone nor telegram nor letter: what is all the nonsense about: is he drowned or dead?"

"Mebbe," said the gargoyle, with a sudden inspiration, "mebbe he's aweh by the steamer!"

"Away by the steamer? To what place?"

"Aw, mebbe to Edinburgh, or Falkirk, or one of them towns in the south," answered the lad, vacantly. "There's plenty of them towns in the south: I've been told that."

In a second the whole situation was changed. For by accident a door leading from this modest little hall had been left open, and as it gave an excellent view of a long and narrow passage—glazed, and ornamented with a number of potted flowers so that it might almost have been called a conservatory—and as by good or ill-luck Dr. Gillespie happened to choose this very moment for crossing the conservatory on his way to further outlying regions, it was obvious to every one concerned that he had been 'caught.'

"You young scoundrel," said Somerled, "why did you tell me Dr. Gillespie was not in the house? I saw him this very moment!"

And the Doctor also knew he had been caught. He at once came back, smiling and peering goodnaturedly over his spectacles.

"Mr. Macdonald," he said, "I have to beg a thousand pardons. I ought to have written to you and made an appointment; but I have been so busy—and am: look at this for a costume in which to receive visitors!"

It certainly was an unusual costume: a large canvas smock, strapped over the shoulders, and reaching to the knees; loose pyjamas of the same material; a wide-brimmed straw-hat; and much-besmeared gloves. As he also carried in one hand a zinc pail, and in the other a hog's hair brush, it almost looked as though he were some infant who had

got picked up on Margate sands, and had been mysteriously inflated by a conjurer.

"And now see why I have to deny myself to everybody; and why I allow my correspondence to accumulate until I get this thing finished——"

"Oh, if I am intruding," said Somerled, and he was for retreating to the door.

"Not at all—not at all!" said the brisk, kindly, energetic Doctor. "You'll just come and look at my great undertaking; and we'll leave the railway confabulation until another day. Oh, faith, there's nothing I would like better than to have a slice of money in Canadian Railways—a young country—an ever-extending country—good credit in the money-markets; but, you see, small folk like myself must not let ourselves drift into the great financial tides; we must stop at home and keep nibbling like a mouse at fireside investments——"

"But, my dear Doctor," said young Macdonald, amazed, "you certainly have not read my letter. I am not come here to sell; I am come to buy—if it should prove possible."

"Well, well, well," said the Doctor, "we'll discuss these affairs afterwards. Come away with me now, and I will show you something!"

At first, when Somerled Macdonald, following his canvas-pinafored guide, entered a large, lofty, hexagonal apartment littered about with screens, ropes and pulleys, and various pieces of machinery, he thought he had got behind the footlights of a theatre; but presently he began to perceive that this gigantic toy had been built to enable a golf-maniac to practice his favourite games when the out-of-door weather was unpropitious.

"We're all unfinished as yet," said the proud constructor, when he had shown his visitor the apparatus for registering the force of drives, the sandbags ready to be changed into bunkers, the putting-green made of baize cloth stretched on elastic wadding, and the like; "and that's what makes me rather welcome a regular downpour of a day; there's no temptation to be off to the links. And you must not imagine we shall always have this shut-in and coped-up look; no, no; of course the windows must have netting over them; but as for those tall panels, now, that are only gradated planes at present, we shall have the perspective of landscape

put into them—the shadowy hills of the north—a sweep of sea, perhaps, and a line of distant shore. I mean to levy toll on every one of those young artist fellows who come through this way: when the weather is too bad for their own work out-of-doors, they'll just come in here and paint me a panel—early morning on the links—a wild sea off Burghead—anything—anything—only it must be faint and remote, and full of air. For my own part, I confine myself to the bunkers; on these one can give one's self a free hand. And yet—yet—not without a touch of suggestion—of romanticism—as one might say." The Doctor was regarding one of the horizontal lengths of canvas with quite a professional eye. "You see the whin bushes there?"

"Yes," answered Somerled, boldly; for at least he could make out some streaky masses of blue-grey that might as well be whin-bushes as anything else.

"Now I am going to try a bit of glorification, as they call it," observed the good Doctor, and he took up the zinc pail, and the hog's hair brush, and began mixing up a viscous sort of fluid of a dull saffron-yellow hue. And then he proceeded to dab little dots here and there; and then more little dots, looking as like furze-blossom as anyone could reasonably expect; but when he came to the crests his decorative enthusiasm ran away with him, and he made of these an almost continuous blaze of golden fire. Because it is strength of effect, it is not refinement of atmosphere, that one wants when one is painting bunkers.

"Capital! Capital! Excellent! First-rate!" called out Somerled; for why should not he constitute himself an art critic as well as another?

The painter retired a step or two, obviously pleased with his work.

"At all events," said he, modestly, "it will give them a clear idea of what they've to get over when they're attempting a short pitch. And now, Mr. Macdonald, let me apologise to you once more for keeping you waiting, and place myself at your service. I confess I was anxious to try the effect," continued the Doctor, and he glanced back, not without complacency, at the whin-bushes.

"But isn't this rather an open place for a business talk?" the younger Macdonald suggested; it certainly was unlike

the private apartments in a banker's palace in Montreal or Toronto.

"Oh, not in the least," the Doctor replied cheerfully. "That monstrous-headed Cerberus of a caddie will drive away everybody from the front door—it was a remarkable fluke your catching a glimpse of me—and the lasses of the house are no fond of bringing their skirts in among zinc pails to get themselves soused with the colours of Joseph's coat."

"Oh, very well," said Somerled—who could see that the Doctor was loth to tear himself away from his landscape triumph. "I shall not waste much of your time. Few words are best, in business affairs. And so—if it is not impertinent, Doctor—I would like to ask you if the Invernish *Observer* is a purchasable commodity."

The gold-rimmed spectacles seemed to grow larger. What could he mean? Of course, the *Observer* was purchasable—one penny, weekly. But did this brazen-faced young Canadian—no matter what his wealth might be, or that of his father—did he want to know what bribe the Invernish *Observer* would take for advertising all over the North of Scotland the latest of his railway enterprises?

"Yes," said Somerled, quite simply. "Hasn't it ever occurred to you that you might wish to part with the paper, and devote your well-earned leisure to poetry and golf? And naturally you must have speculated as to the marketable value of the property. In short, Dr. Gillespie, if you are willing to sell the Invernish *Observer* and if the sum is reasonable, I will buy it—and you shall name the valuator."

The Doctor stared at this young man. There could be no doubt as to his seriousness. The calm brown eyes were as outspoken as ever in their grave and honest glance; the thoughtfulness of his features—that kind of quick, appreciative thoughtfulness that robs a keen and firm face of much of its outward austerity—was as much in evidence as ever. And yet here he was offering to buy the Invernish *Observer*—founded in 1836—one of the most influential journals in the North and West of Scotland—as if it had been a pennyworth of barley-sugar!

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Doctor. "That is a large proposition, in so small a nutshell. And, as you say, this is too open a place for serious business talk. Come

away into the dining-room, my dear Sir ; and if you'll give me a couple of seconds I'll change into more respectable clothing. For I'll not deny but that I have sometimes thought of retiring from editorial responsibilities, and enjoying the fruits of many years of labour ; and of course if I were to part with the newspaper, it would be to one who could afford, like yourself, to keep up its good name and standing. However, one moment—just one moment—"

He went back to the pail, and took the brush, and administered a few final and critical touches to the furze-blossom, advancing and retiring to observe the effect. Perhaps this was cunningly to intimate to his visitor that he was after all not so very anxious to sell ; perhaps it arose out of genuine artistic faith : who can determine ? What happened after this brief delay was that he showed Somerled into the adjacent dining-room ; and put a decanter of port and a decanter of sherry on the table, along with a couple of old-fashioned glasses and a silver basket containing shortbread and biscuits ; then he hastened away to alter his attire ; and in a minute or two he was back again, all suavity, and politeness, and profound and artful diplomacy.

But the good Doctor's wily dispositions were all thrown away upon this young man, who spoke so simply and clearly to the point, and whose contemplative dark eyes, though they were never in a hurry, seemed somehow to anticipate what his companion had to say. First of all this younger of the two Macdonalds had to explain that he did not bind himself to accept any valuation ; he only asked in the meantime for some rough guess as to the possible price, that he might know whether a certain project of his came within the sphere of practical politics ; thereafter, if there was a probability of their agreeing about terms, the whole affair of the transference would be handed over in due course to the lawyers, to let them work their wicked wills.

"You're not thinking of the county ?" said the Doctor, of a sudden, looking up. "For I should warn you that Sir Robert is considered to have a perfectly safe seat."

"No, no," replied the younger man, indifferently. "I have no ambitions that way. I don't even know what your politics are : I suppose they chiefly consist in badgering the Government for more grants. In any case, after the end

of this week, I do not think I shall trouble Invernish or Invernish-shire much more."

"Leaving us? And yet you want to become the owner of the Invernish *Observer!*" cried the proprietor and editor of that excellent paper.

"I may tell you what my scheme is a little later on," said Somerled Macdonald—who appeared unusually self-absorbed this morning; his rapid perceptions seemed a bit dulled somehow; perhaps he was thinking of something else besides the estimated value of the newspaper. And then he made an effort to recall himself.

"Come, come, Dr. Gillespie," said he, "if you have ever thought of selling the *Observer*, you must have formed some kind of conjecture as to its worth as a property. And a very rough guess would be sufficient for me, at present."

The Doctor went and got some writing paper, drew in a chair to the table, and pulled out his little gold pencil, and presently was deep—or pretended to be deep—in figures. When, some quarter of an hour or so thereafter, Somerled Macdonald splashed out into the wet again, he knew that at any moment—or as soon as the lawyers had performed their grave antics around the process—he could become the proprietor of the Invernish *Observer*.

And then he walked back along the wooded heights until he came to the Castle hill, and there he entered the enclosure, and went forward and seated himself on a wooden bench, overlooking the wide and smurred and dismal landscape—the uplands half-hidden in the mists—the Cathedral and its twin towers down by the river—scattered villas and gardens—the suspension bridges—the roaring black current with its whirling scraps of green twig. It still poured. Now and again a faint, mysterious light—an almost imperceptible glow—would stealthily appear among the hills about Glen Urquhart, and then there was almost a hope of the sun breaking through in the south; while far away in the north twisted wreaths of vapour would begin to ascend, revealing the lower slopes of the Ben Wyvis mountains, until one vainly sought for a glimpse of the higher aerial blue; then gradually and slowly the weighty masses of cloud deepened and pressed down once more, and the relentless rain resumed, hissing on the dark swing of the flood. It

was a sombre and phantasmal world, and a world apparently quite devoid of life or colour, save for one small speck of orange that moved quickly along on the other side of the stream, past the Cathedral and under the great range of elms. The tiny flame-like atom that thus steadily made its way through the gloomy landscape was a carriage; and if Somerled Macdonald had been better acquainted with the features of this district he might have known it was Lord Mountmahon's yellow barouche—now on the road leading out to Glengarva House. In fact, he paid no attention to it; he was more engaged with those twisting vapours that were wreathing their grey folds round the lower corries of Ben Wyvis; and he may have been thinking that if that lofty region seemed sufficiently ghostly and remote, there was one still more solitary and lonely, one still further away in the isolation of the north, that would in a few days' time now receive and shut off from the rest of the world his father and himself. But before leaving for the solitudes of the shores of Alt-na-Traive, he would of course have to go out and say a last good-bye to Eelin Macdonald, for whom, this very morning, he had just been purchasing—or preparing to purchase—a little wedding-present.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A DEED OF GIFT.

On the evening previous to their departure for the north the Canadian Macdonalds entertained at dinner the two ladies of Glengarva House, their only other guests being Archie Gilchrist and Dr. Gillespie. Somerled had secured a suite of rooms on the first floor of the hotel; he had ransacked the town for little prettinesses of decoration; extra waiters had been sent through from Edinburgh; and Covent Garden was responsible for the fruit and flowers. The tall old blind man was eagerly excited about these various preparations; all the more so that it was only through the ear that he could learn how they were going forward.

"Spare nothing, Lad," he would insist, "Spare nothing. It is a great honour they are doing us. Let them see that we are sensible of it."—And this to Somerled Macdonald, of all people in the wide world!

Archie Gilchrist was the first to arrive; and he was almost immediately followed by Dr. Gillespie, who was acting as usher to the two ladies whom he had found in the hall below. Alas! when Gilchrist, who had hung back a little, saw Eelin Macdonald enter this reception-room—so smiling and radiant she was—glancing a friendly recognition to this one, and with a kindly word for that—his heart sank within him. She was so far away from him—so unattainable—so unapproachable: he and she might be engaged lovers, but worlds lay between them none the less. Why, even the subdued splendour of her costume—of a pale canary-coloured silk it was, with the close chiffon sleeves ending in a little fringe half-way over the hand—even that impressed him with a sense of distance. That was not the

kind of attire worn by the people among whom he had been brought up. She seemed a being come from some other region altogether—lustrous—commanding—all-conquering; though, to be sure, when she came up to him and shook hands with him, there was a sort of girlish shyness in her look and a tinge of colour in her forehead. And then, after a few minutes of murmured conversation, dinner was announced; and Somerled Macdonald, giving his arm to the younger of the two ladies, led the way into the dining-room, taking his position at the foot of the table, while his father and the Bean-an-Tighearn passed along to the head. The seats had been skilfully arranged. Archie Gilchrist and Eelin Macdonald found themselves right opposite each other, so that they could interchange word or jest or assenting nod, just as they liked; while as for Somerled himself, who was conscious of being rather a dull and stupid person (though with a certain capacity in his own business, perhaps) he had placed himself at the lower end of the table, so that he could be left out of the talk without much notice being taken.

And indeed at this end of the banqueting-board there was at first a certain measure of vague and ill-defined constraint. It was a farewell evening, no doubt; and yet three young people sitting down to dinner need not have been so repressed—so afraid of each other, as a stranger might have imagined. Their elders up there had immediately started a discussion on the news just received from Ottawa—and not very good news either—about the crofters' settlements in the North West Territory and about the possibility of the British Government coming to their aid; but the younger people, who ought to have been the liveliest of the company—what were they about? Now and again Somerled would offer some little remark, rather implying that he was listening to the elder folk; but for the most part he was silent; and then it was that Eelin felt rather than knew that his eyes were covertly fixed on her. Friendly eyes they were, and sincere and kind; but once or twice that she caught him thus regarding her there was a sort of wistfulness in his expression that somewhat startled her. She grew nervous; the air at this end of the room seemed charged with electricity; and then again her proud spirit at all times chafed against surveillance, no matter how

respectful and distant it might be. And at length she suddenly turned to Archie Gilchrist, and addressed him across the table.

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist," said she, with quite a gay air, "did you ever hear about Lily Neile's sparrow?"

Archie Gilchrist looked up gladly enough; he had never heard of Miss Neile's sparrow; in truth, he did not believe in the existence of any such creature; for he knew that Eelin, when she was inventing romantic tales of the animal world, generally claimed as her authority her chief friend and companion. And at this same moment there was silence at the upper end of the table; for old Allan Macdonald, hearing the sound of Eelin's voice, instantly ceased talking about the High Commissioner and the mismanaged crofts.

"A sparrow, did you say?" he called to her.

"Oh, Mr. Macdonald, don't encourage her!" her mother protested. "I know it is some outrageous piece of nonsense —I can see it in her face."

"Well, then, it isn't!" said Eelin, valiantly. "Why, you can judge for yourself! You can always tell whether a story is true by the details. Are they probable? Do they fit? And that's what they call *vraisemblance*. Now, Dr. Gillespie, there is no *vraisemblance* about the stories you print in the *Observer*—sent you from outlying districts —about lambs with ten legs—and similar stuff——"

"My dear young lady, my sub-editors are responsible for all such things," the Doctor exclaimed. "Ask Mr. Gilchrist there to cut off as many of the lamb's legs as you please——"

"Now listen to what happened to Lily Neile," she said, imperiously. "Pay attention to the details; see whether they fit; whether there's *vraisemblance;* and if you don't believe, then write to the editor of the *Spectator*, and he'll confirm every word—by means of intuition. That's another thing, you know. You ought to have intuition—before you can decide upon the truth of a story. However, this is it. Just at the end of last winter, you may recollect, there was a spell of very hard weather—everything frozen up; and one morning Lily Neile and her cousin Barbara were going into the town, and they had just shut the door behind them, when Lily saw on the lawn beside the drive a

sparrow that was acting in a very singular manner. It was lying on its back, and was kicking with its feet, while its wings seemed all awry and stiff, and yet not quite motionless, for they could flutter the least little bit. 'Oh, Lily,' says Barbara, 'it's dying of cold; what are we to do?' Well, Lily Neile is a very practical sort of girl, I should have told you. She stepped out on to the grass, and took up the sparrow, and tried to smooth its wings, and then she put it into her snug muff, and carried it gently back into the house. And there they set to revive it, and coddle it—lukewarm milk, at first, and then softened crumbs, on the hearthrug in front of the fire; and it was quite marvellous how quickly it came to. They thought of making a tame sparrow of it, now that it knew they would treat it kindly; but Barbara, being a thoughtful sort of girl, said that it ought to have its choice, so she opened the window, and put the sparrow on the sill, to see whether it would go or stay. It may have been grateful or it may not; at all events, after a little preening of its feathers away it flew, as merry as a grig."

She looked round.

"So far the Court is with you," said the Doctor, but not without suspicion—for he knew this young lady.

"Ah, but that is just what I wanted you to admit!" she returned, triumphantly. "You confess that the details are probable; that there is what the critics call *vraisemblance;* that the story carries conviction with it; in short, that it is true. That is all I want you to admit; for of course you can't deny that a story that is true one day may be equally true the next. Yes," she observed, calmly. "Next day the same sparrow came and played its antics on the lawn; and again it was taken indoors and coddled and petted, until it had had enough of lukewarm crumbs and milk: and then again it flew away. That's all right. That's easily intelligible. When a sparrow has once successfully shammed being frozen, it will naturally repeat the performance, so long as there's food to be got by it and coddling. But how that sparrow could teach a number of its mates to play the same game—or whether it was merely imitation on their part—but to see that lawn with six or eight sparrows fluttering and kicking on their back whenever Lily Neile made her appearance at the door—"

"Eelin, for shame!" her mother cried; but Archie Gilchrist looked up, and said gravely—

"Oh, but that story must be true, for it is so excellent an illustration of the doctrine of evolution. Undoubtedly—undoubtedly——"

And then the moment she had found an ally she was off into other fields of nonsense and natural history and pseudo-science; and she reasoned with her elders about their unbelief, and chided them; and always, whatever were her arguments or her assertions, she looked across the table, to Archie Gilchrist, for corroboration. Yes, it was all very entertaining, and fascinating, and mischievously bewildering—her youthful gaiety and audacity—the sharp cleverness of her retorts and her laughing quips and merriments; nevertheless (had they but known it) it was all too dangerously near to tears. She professed to address herself mainly to Gilchrist; but she was conscious the while that a pair of calm and observant eyes—sincere, earnest, and not unkindly in their transparent brown deeps—were regarding her. And then, unexpectedly finding an opportunity, she turned from these idle diversions; and she said—perhaps a little proudly—to Somerled Macdonald—

"Why are you going to Alt-na-Traive? I hear you have taken a place there. And yet I thought you said this country was no country for you."

"You still keep up that phrase against me?" he said, with a smile. "Yet I only suggested to my father that there was too much of magic and romance in the atmosphere of these regions for an ordinary person who wanted to keep his head clear of dreams."

"Why do you go at the end of the season?" she asked again. "All the shooting and fishing tenants will be making for the south very soon now. And the winter—what will you do in the dullness of the winter?"

"There is a bit of winter-shooting, I believe," he answered her, "but I was thinking mostly of my father. The Traive is one of the earliest salmon-rivers in Scotland; clean fish begin to come up from the sea in December, if the weather is at all open; and then at the middle of January my father and old Angus can set to work either on the river or by trolling in the loch—"

"The bleakness!" she exclaimed. "The desolation——"

"That does not matter to a blind man," he replied to her. "Summer and winter are alike to a blind man—if he is protected from the heat and the cold. And trolling for salmon is just what my father can do best; for he does not notice the shaking of the point of the rod, and before he strikes the fish has time to make a good bolt of the minnow."

"Then it may be a long time before you are in Invernish again?" she said, rather nervously.

"I am afraid so," he made answer—and he spoke in quite a matter-of-fact way: "You see, if any of my partners on the other side were so inhuman as to summon me across the water—though I think I have made arrangements to prevent that possibility—and if I were travelling south in a hurry, of course I should go straight through. But that is not likely to happen. I should be vexed to have to leave my father alone at Alt-na-Traive.——"

"Oh, wouldn't you let me——" And then she suddenly stopped, in some little confusion; and indeed she had no opportunity of making clear her request, for at this moment a glance from the Bean-an-Tighearn signalled to her, and presently the two ladies had risen from the table, and arm-in-arm were making their way towards the withdrawing-room.

When cigars, coffee, and liqueurs had been formally brought in, Somerled said in an undertone to Archie Gilchrist—

"Can I have a word or two with you?"

He rose, and Gilchrist followed him. They went into a deep window-recess where there were chairs, but they did not sit down.

"Only a word or two," Somerled said, "and I hope you will meet me in a placable spirit, and show yourself reasonable, even if I should seem to be impertinent. You told me that you and Miss Macdonald were engaged to be married?"

"I told you so as an absolute secret!" interposed Gilchrist, hastily.

"And I promised that I would keep your secret," responded Somerled, quietly. "Well, all I need say is that you are lucky, to be the man of her choice. The one she has chosen—lucky is perhaps not the best word."

"It does not bear to be spoken about as yet," Gilchrist

said. "It is all so distant and uncertain; and it must remain distant and uncertain while she wishes it to be so, for what she wishes is law to me—and no wonder. I could not be so ungrateful as to become importunate—especially as I am situated at present."

"That is what I am coming to," Somerled continued, in quite a dispassionate way. "The truth is, I have been forming my own opinion as to the state of affairs, from an outsider's point of view, of course. And I dare say, now, it would be more satisfactory to the mother—and also to the daughter herself, going amongst her friends—if you had a more assured position—will you let me be quite frank, and say a more distinguished position?"

"Don't I know that?" said Gilchrist; the words were true: why should he take offence?

"Yes, I guessed that you must have been considering this aspect of the future——"

"And not over hopefully," put in the other, in rather a downcast way.

"You see," Somerled Macdonald proceeded—as if he were talking of steel rails—"in that literary world where you and she first made acquaintance—in that imaginary world—all people are equal, I suppose; and 'White Cockade' and 'Fairfax' are of any grade, or no grade at all; but in the actual world, where Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig has her friends and companions to meet—where she has to be introduced to visitors—strangers, perhaps, curious to see her because of her lineage and her historical name—to say nothing of her own brilliant and striking personality—these people might naturally ask, 'And who is this whom she has married?'"

"Don't I know—don't I know?" Gilchrist exclaimed: what was the use of raking up all those troubled forecasts and apprehensions, that he was only too familiar with in the sleepless hours of the night?

"Now we have arrived at the point," the young railway-king resumed, with something of a blither air. "You remember how I bored you the other day with questions about the social estimation enjoyed by the proprietor and editor of the Invernish *Observer;* and you were most explicit: a most distinguished position; a position of influence and power; a position entitling the holder of it

to great consideration, not merely municipal. And of course, if ever I should go back to Ontario again, and if one of the old Glengarva folk should be saying to me : 'Well, and is it true that Miss Eelin has got married, and who is the one she has married ?' then I should be proud to answer : 'Oh, a very notable man—one of the most prominent men in the north of Scotland—the proprietor of that very Invernish *Observer* that comes out here sometimes, and is sent round the farms. Miss Eelin has married a man of standing and consideration in the Northern and Western Highlands ; what he writes in the *Observer* they have to pay attention to in the House of Commons.' That would be fine news, indeed ; and if any of them had happened to hear of the Mountmahon rumour, it would put an end to that for good and all. And so I consider myself justified in what I have done—that is, if you'll be peaceful and reasonable, and show no false pride—"

"But I don't understand," said Archie Gilchrist, with the great grey eyes grown quite mystified. One thing only he knew : this was no sorry jest, or the name of Eelin Macdonald would not have been introduced into it—by Somerled Macdonald.

"Why, man, it's simple enough !" his companion said, regarding him. "The paper's yours. The Invernish *Observer* is yours—lock, stock and barrel—freehold building, plant, machinery,—everything—with the proviso that some Mr.—Grieve, is it ?—should retain his present post, and perhaps with some little increase of salary, to reconcile him to your stepping over his head. Now, do you understand ? No ? Well, I have bought this property—that is to say, Dr. Gillespie and I are practically agreed to accept the rough valuation that has been made—only, the lawyers must have their turn at it, and that may be a tedious business. However, at this present moment you are virtually and literally the owner of the Invernish *Observer*, and editor as well—"

"But it is impossible !" said Gilchrist. "I have no capital—I could never repay. It is a large property ; I have no one at my back ; how could I ever pay the interest on so great a sum ?"

"Gilchrist, man, why will you fly off at a tangent ?" Macdonald said—and yet he was amused. "I wish to make

Miss Eelin a little wedding-present; and you talk of your being unable to pay me interest on the purchase-money! Go away! Why not be reasonable, and placable, and step into Dr. Gillespie's shoes—and let the poor man off to his golf? Must I explain any further? Must I try to show you that my scheme is not so preposterous as it may look at first sight? Well, then, it comes to this. I have got a good bit of money—with a machine constructed for making more; and I am a lonely man; my father is almost my sole companion, and he cannot last for ever; then I am inveigled into this country of wonder and poetry, and wild romance—at least, so I have been taught to consider it ever since my childhood; and then the two ladies of Kinvaig—but I cannot tell you how out there we regard them—they are just about worshipped, if only for the name they bear—then they honour us by their kindness and their condescension far beyond what any human creature could imagine; and then comes a chance of my executing a small piece of bravado in a quiet way—and how can I resist? I suppose the witchery in the atmosphere has got hold of me. Moreover, I have never had much fancy for self-advertising; I should not care to go about the country receiving votes of thanks from town councils, and that kind of thing; but here is a little proposition that need never be whispered to anyone except those immediately concerned—that is, if you have a grain of common-sense. And by-and-bye, no doubt when you have occupied the editorial chair for a time, and kept up the literary reputation of the paper, then one of the Universities will be conferring a degree upon you—"

"But this is too astounding!" Gilchrist protested. "Why, you don't know me! I am almost a stranger to you. Why should you interest yourself in me?"

"Why should I interest myself in you?" his companion repeated, slowly. "Why?" And then, after a moment's hesitation, he seemed to laugh the question aside. "Come, come," he said, more briskly, "let's have no further talking. The thing is settled."

For by this time the elder Macdonald—out there in the brilliantly-lit room—had twice called to his son, urging him to make haste: it was time they went to join their other guests. And now, as Somerled and Gilchrist passed along by the side of the table, the latter said in a low voice—

"Is what you have just told me to remain a secret?"

"Not from any one who is here with us this night," was the answer.

"Not from any one?"

"No—unless you please."

Then, when they went into the drawing-room, Archie Gilchrist managed to secure a seat next Eelin Macdonald, and he said that he had a communication to make to her that would surprise her a little. Old Allan Macdonald, guided by the Doctor, had gone on to talk to the Bean-an-Tighearn; and so Somerled, for the moment finding himself superfluous, turned idly to the window, to look down into the street. And then it was that Archie Gilchrist told his tale of this munificent thing that had befallen him—and her, too, in a way; and all the time that he was telling her, Wild Eelin never once let her earnest gaze wander from the face of the man who was standing at the window. It was only his profile that she could see; but it seemed to occupy her engrossingly.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A LETTER.

"HERE—Haggart!—David Haggart!" called Morag, as she scurried up the drive and round by the holly hedge, so as to overtake Maxwell the gardener. "You that's the fine one to murder people—you that's the fine one to break open chiles—here's something for you."

"Oh, what are ye clamrin' aboot noo, ye Mull idjit!" said old Maxwell, angrily.

"Do you think I am to do all the fighting for this house?" Morag demanded. "Come aweh, now! For I can see the yellow cab; and his lordship will be here in a meenute; and he will be for killing me bekass I put him in the hole by the window. Come aweh, now, and show what a great hero you are, and a murderer, and a fighter. The cab will be at the door directly——"

"Ay, and wha tell't ye it was my business to answer the door bell?" said Maxwell, with irascible brows as he moved on to his work.

Then Morag jeered after him.

"Aw, indeed, it is no matter, and we can protect ourselves ferry well; only I wass wishing to see how such a desperate brave man would battle for us. But mebbe David Haggart's soul is aweh buzzin' about the skies just now; and instead of murdering chilers, and brekkin' open chiles, and being hanged in Edinburgh, you are only old Maxwell, that wass not tekkin so many prizes at the Fruit and Flower Show!"

"Ye limmer!" he said—and he glanced about for a stone; but Morag was quicker than he was; for she whipped a green apple off a branch and sent it spinning so near to his head that he had quickly to shield himself with his basket. And then, with a horse-laugh of triumph, she made off—for she

wanted to see what was going on in front, while Maxwell, returning to his work, could only comfort himself with malevolent animadversions on Morag's personal appearance —"Ye red-heeded, freckled, thrawn-gabbed jaud," he muttered to himself, "if ye want to frichten his lordship or anybody else, frichten them wi' a look o' your misbegotten, ill-faured face!"

Meanwhile Morag had hidden herself behind some laurel-bushes, through which she could command a view of the situation; but if she were eagerly expectant of some deadly fray—and perhaps not disinclined to take a part in the same —her warlike hopes were wholly disappointed. For Lord Mountmahon, having descended from the canary-coloured barouche, and gone up the steps to the front door, found himself confronted by the placid-eyed and smooth-spoken Jane who (unmindful of the fact that her father was an elder, and that she herself had been brought up as a decent, honest, truth-telling lass) calmly informed the visitor that the ladies of the house were not at home.

"Oh, it's too bad," he said to her, in petulant mortification. "I've come out three times—so as to deliver this letter in person. It's too bad. I'm not used to being treated in this way. Do you know who I am? I'm not used to it. Perhaps you never gave my messages?——"

"Oh, yes, my lord!" Jane protested.

"Well, I call it a measly shame," he went on, in the same hurt manner. "I don't want to bother their heads off; all I want is to give this letter into Mrs. Macdonald's hands, and to sit in the hall waiting for her answer. Gosh, to think of it!" he continued—but addressing himself rather than Jane. "Sitting on a chair in the hall, like an auctioneer's clerk! Well, I'll do it. My dignity is my own to put in my pocket if I please; and when I've made up my mind to see a thing through, by George, I stick to it——"

"If your lordship would leave the letter," Jane ventured to suggest. "I will take care my mistress has it the moment she comes in."

"Well, I suppose that must be the way of it, after all," his lordship said, sullenly. "I'm sick of this tomfoolery; I'm tired of being turned away from anybody's door. Now mind you give it to her at once; and say I'm expecting an answer as soon as ever it is convenient. Mind you make

no mistake about it—and wait a minute—here is something for yourself— "

He fumbled about, and got a half-crown, which he would have presented to her, but Jane drew back.

"My mistress does not wish me to take presents— "

"Oh, d——n your mistress ! " he said in a temper ; and he dashed the half-crown on to the steps ; and then he got into his barouche again—'chist sweerin and sweerin,' as Morag subsequently informed her fellow-servants.

Now this letter that Jane carried to her mistress, who was peacefully knitting in the drawing-room, was of a cunning kind, but it was so transparently cunning as to be almost pathetic. Of course he expressed the profoundest penitence for his unforgivable conduct on that previous visit ; but all through these self-abasements there ran the piteous key-note of the loss of his mother. It was the lack of her influence that had been the ruin of his life. Ah, but if he were to find a second mother—as good, and kind, and gentle, and ready to take his part : what might not the result be then ?

'I don't seek to excuse myself at all,' he wrote, 'for what happened the last time I saw you. I must have been off my head : I believe that's what it really was, for all the doctors tell me that medsin goes to my brane. I can take as good a lashing of wine as most folks, but medsin plays the very mischief with me and I was a fool to go and call upon any one after I had been taking quinine and cloriform and muck of that sort. My dear mother, if she had been alive, she would have kept them out of my reach, she used to, when I was a kid, but when you are grown-up, and left to yourself, and surrounded by a lot of selfish beasts that care only for what they can get out of you, then they'd let you shove your head into a bucket of cloriform if they'd a chance of picking your pockets. And to think that this devilish thing should have occurred just at the end of the season, when I had got everybody cleared away so as you and Miss Eelin could pay a visit to Kinvaig, and not only that, but I had arranged with Lady Dundas to let me have six stags out of Balcruitten—£300—from the 1st to the 15th ; and any noble sportsman you might bring along with you as your escort would have been welcome to the stalking. The fact is I'm

not quite fit and up to hill-work at present, what with trouble, and all this medsin, and *perhaps anxious hopes*. And now it's all spoilt by that accursed cloriform. It's too bad. I can't offer any excuse, but still I feel that it's uncommon hard luck. That's just where it is, that all my life I've been left to my own devices, without guidance, trying to do my best, and always managing to bash my head against a stone wall, when other Johnnies got clear over. And now, as this affair stands, I know I'm in pretty bad case. If the poor dear Mater were alive, I could send her to you to meditate for me, and besides wouldn't she be immensely curious to catch a glimps of SOMEBODY, and as I trust that SOMEBODY has been left ignorant of these regretable circumstances, then it only remains for you, dear Mrs. Macdonald, to be a little merciful, and let a poor devil have another chance, and perhaps your friend who comes with you to Kinvaig may get the six stags after all, and all be well. While there's life, there's hope—that's my motto; and though things are looking rather beastly at present, I admit, still there may be merry days ahead, and one must never throw up the sponge. If they jam you into a pocket—star one!—and come up smiling—that's what I say.

'Of course I know there are things rumoured about me, and that some of them have appeared in those low, mongrel, miserable papers that exist by their malignant and envious abuse of the upper classes. Censers of morals these gentlemen profess to be, but if the rats were dragged out of their drains into the daylight you'd see the kind of censers they really are! Naturally a peer is a conspicuous mark for them; and you can't be hauling them into the law-courts every other day, and paying the costs, for the scoundrels haven't the rag of a paper penny amongst them; and so the libels spread and flourish, and one goes on defenceless—until perhaps you chance upon one or two honourable and kindly women who have a little charity and forgiveness, and who will make excuses, and receive you, and treat you *as one of their own family*. That would be redemtion and no mistake, and just to think it was near coming off when this infernal business of the medsin interferes, and I'm stumped up in a jiffy! *Unless you hold out the olive branch.* That is what my mother would have done in your place, I am certain sure.

'There now, my dear lady, if you don't consider this apology abject enough, I'll make it abjecter—as much as you like; for when I see a great prize just right ahead of me I'm not going to stick at trifles by the-way. Keep your eye on the goal—that's my motto; and it's wonderful what persistence can do for you. It's better even than good luck; and that's my experience of life, short and merry as my whirligig of an existence has been. Well, there's a screed, now. Didn't know I could have managed it; but I hope you'll believe every word of it, and keep all that incident from the knowledge of the beautiful Eelin, for I know that the mother of such an angel must be *an angel herself*, and generous, and not too down on an unfortunate chap who has chanced to make an overwhelming jackass of himself, just once in a blue moon. And perhaps I'll wait in the hall for an answer, or perhaps I'll leave the letter, anyway you'll tell me as soon as you can make up your mind when I may call on you and square up matters and cry quits, and perhaps I may have a few minutes' chat with the *Bell of the North* if you don't mind giving us the opportunity.

'Yours faithfully,

'(A most humble and repentant sinner.)

'MOUNTMAHON.'

When she had definitely ascertained that Lord Mountmahon had driven away, and that there was no chance of encountering him anywhere outside, the Bean-an-Tighearn took this letter with her, passed through the French windows of the drawing-room, and went round towards the shrubbery. She knew that Wild Eelin would be somewhere about; for that young lady had just received, for review in the Invernish *Observer*, a book entitled 'Life in Graubünden'; and she had pounced upon it with conscientious avidity, determined to read every line of it from end to end—yes, and to give it such favourable notice as might accord with her own superior knowledge, for few were better acquainted with the Grisons than she herself. And her mother guessed that most likely she had hidden herself away in one of these bosky nooks; and "Eelin," she called—"Eelin, Eelin, where are you?"

The answer seemed to drop from the skies.

"What is it, Mummie?"

The startled mother glanced upward and found that the wretch of a girl had discovered a comfortable seat for herself on a branch half-way up a maple tree, and there she was engaged with her book, though one hand had hold of a bundle of twigs, for safety's sake.

"Come down—come down at once!" the irate mother exclaimed. "They'll see you from the other side of the river!"

"And won't they think it a wonderful sight?" she answered coolly. "A black-haired goddess enthroned among bronze leaves, and half-way up to the clouds!"

"Come down!"

"Oh, very well," she answered again, as she made preparations for her descent. "But," she added, innocently, "it isn't nearly so easy as it looks, when you've a volume in your hand that mustn't be scratched." And yet she managed to swing herself down from branch to branch with a remarkable agility; and then a clear drop of six or seven feet landed her by her mother's side.

"I wish you'd give over these boyish tricks, Eelin," the mother said, with unusual resentment. "Life is too serious for such things. And I don't want all the responsibility. Look at this letter. It concerns you—more than you anticipate. And you'd better sit down and read it, for it is long, and it wants consideration."

"Very sorry to have vexed you, Mummie," the girl said, as she carried the letter to a garden-seat. "And I seem always to be doing it. But then, I am sincerely penitent, you know."

"Well, you'll find plenty of penitence in these pages," the mother rejoined. "And perhaps you will be moved to a little commiseration and a little sympathy. But I don't know: I don't advise: it's for you to say: there may be something in his representations or there may not. At any rate he appears to have been a very unfortunate and ill-guided young man—" And with that she moved away to the terrace under the trees overlooking the river: she would give Eelin plenty of time for pondering over this specious, half-piteous schoolboy appeal; and indeed it had furnished herself with some subject for thought and hesitation, though she would hardly have admitted as much.

When Eelin had finished the letter, she crossed the tennis lawn, and joined her mother on the terrace.

"At least there is one who thinks well of me!" said she, proudly.

"And who thinks ill of you, Eelin?"

"They don't take the trouble to think well or ill. And maybe I'm no minding. But this one tells me what I am; listen: I am the beautiful Eelin; I am a prize; I am a goal; I am the *Bell of the North*—without an e:" She had been mocking; but now came an uncontrollable gesture of disgust: "Here, mother, take it away: I can smell the stale cigarette-smoke and the whiskey."

The mother received back the offending pages, and still doubtfully regarded them.

"But what am I to say, Eelin!"

"My compliments to Lord Mountmahon," the girl replied, scornfully, "And tell him I am not of the marrying kind."

"Now what can you mean!" the Bean-an-Tighearn exclaimed. "When at this very moment you are engaged to be married!"

"Oh, but that's a different thing," Wild Eelin answered, with some conscious colour on her forehead. "That's very different, you know. That's a long way off. There is to be no pressure; one is to be allowed one's freedom—naturally. And besides, just at present Archie Gilchrist is a good deal too busily occupied to have a thought for me. And there are times when you must cut sentimentalities adrift. Taking over the charge of that paper must be rather a big enterprise, I should imagine; only he has broad shoulders; and plenty of courage. Oh, yes, Mummie, you may depend on it he has his hands full—without any intrusion from me. The best I can do is to wish him good luck."

"I don't understand you at all, Eelin, or what is to become of you," the anxious mother said. "Do you really mean to marry Mr. Gilchrist?"

"Mummie, I've 'made up the promise true'!" she cried. "And would you have me break it?" But she altered her tone when she glanced again at the letter her mother held in her hand. "As for *that*—don't you give yourself any more trouble, Mummie, darling, and pretend to have lingering hesitations. Do you think I cannot guess what you are willing to sacrifice—all your best and tenderest feelings, your pride, and in a way your sense of honour—to give me one more chance of attaining a lofty position, as many

would consider it? Yes, and you know it's yourself who would perish from shame if I accepted! Well, put it away from you—"

"Eelin," the mother pleaded, but rather faintheartedly, "he asks for forgiveness. And it is I who was insulted, not you; and it is I who have the right to forgive——"

"And I tell you whoever insults you insults me twenty times over!" said the girl, vehemently. "Oh, mother, dearest, don't pretend any more! Be true to yourself! You know you would die of shame if I married him. For I can see through you now: though at first I was mean enough to think that you might wish—that you might expect—well, what is never going to happen. And now you'll come away into the drawing-room at once, and get the answer written and sent off, in case he should make it the excuse for paying us another visit." And so she put her hand within her mother's arm; and together they crossed the lawn to the house; and on their way she said lightly: "Oh, but I am a proud girl this day, Mummie! I have been called a prize, and a goal, and I don't know what besides—and all by a half-drunken potboy who can't spell!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FRIARS' WALK.

About this time Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig was causing a good deal of trouble to the tradesmen with whom she dealt. Formerly, when purchasing things for her various pensioners, she had simply paid for them in happy-go-lucky fashion until the last of her money was gone; and then she would don the penitential badge of the Parish of Huntly, and wear it at dinner, to see if her mother's heart would relent. But now she was running two sets of accounts; and one of these, as the drapers, and grocers, and upholsterers discovered, had to be kept with a scrupulous accuracy—a kind of vindictive accuracy, one might almost say—with vouchers for every sixpence expended. And why? Well, it was to send a report of her stewardship to Somerled Macdonald, and to show him that, in dealing with the money he had handed her in trust, she did not expect him to rest content with her own discretion, she preferred he should learn for himself how every penny had been laid out. And so here she was (having just left the town) seated on a bench in the Castle hill enclosure, going over a handful of these crumpled documents. And very well aware was she that this formal forwarding of details —to acquit herself, as it were—would deeply offend and wound the young railway king; and she wickedly hoped it would; though she did not ask herself why. A sort of rebellious pride had got hold of her. She did not wish to be anybody's almoner, to have irresponsible control of money, and reap gratitude which was not her due. Let him come and discover for himself what poor clansfolk were in need of help. But at all events, while she retained the position, these checked and receipted bills of disbursements

—no matter how minute—would be periodically dispatched to him. They would form the last link of communication between him and her; for a great space of silence, with dim hills and voiceless skies, now lay between Glengarva House and the distant Alt-na-Traive.

By some accident or other her attention was diverted from these papers, and happening to glance downwards to the banks of the wide and clear-shining river, she saw that Archie Gilchrist was coming in to the town—his tall figure and swinging gait she easily recognised. And there was no reason in the world why she should not continue on her way home and meet him, and say a civil word to him in passing; for he had proved himself to be the most obedient of lovers; and not only that, but he had shown himself possessed of a most extraordinary sensitiveness in detecting and responding to her varying moods. She had nothing to fear from him. He was to her just whatever she wished him to be; and he had a marvellous gift of divining what she meant, without many words spoken. He held himself as far aloof as even she could desire, and surely an incidental 'How do you do?' was but a small and simple acknowledgement of so much consideration. But something of 'la belle dame sans merci' was in her blood this morning. The moment she caught sight of him she thrust those documents into the small bag she usually carried; she rose from the seat; and instead of going down to the river bank, which was her ordinary route homeward, she left the Castle hill grounds, and went quickly along the high road leading out into the country. But this she did not follow for any great distance. She came to a turnstile, and passed through it; and now she was in the lonely and unfrequented Friars' Walk; and she concluded that she had come thither unobserved.

The Friars' Walk is a long and winding pathway, cut and built up on the face of the steep and thickly-wooded hill that here overlooks the Nish; and as it is a *cul-de-sac*, it is rarely visited in the daytime, though occasionally towards the gloaming fond lovers may linger under its canopy of leaves and listen to the Cathedral bells far below on the other side of the stream. Wild Eelin found herself in sole possession of this secret highway. And now and again she would stop to contemplate one or other of the

detached and ever-varying pictures framed by the extending branches of beech and birch and rowan out of the spacious landscape—a far-stretching and dappled landscape that darkened into gloom, or leapt up again in sunshine, as the cumulus masses of cloud came swinging over from the sea. From this lofty terrace a great range of country was visible; but she paid less heed to the dusky hills in the south—by Dochfour, and Castle Urquhart, and Balmacaan; and she paid no heed at all to the swelling uplands opposite her, where the scattered farm-cottages, on the undulations of green and yellow, shone like little white dots in the chasing sunlight; rather her vision was turned towards the north, where, away beyond the slopes and plantations of the Black Isle, and away beyond the Cromarty Firth, the mountains of Ross-shire rose wild and blue into the changing heavens. And there were other regions, still further off, behind that giant rampart, that her imagination could summon up for her. She knew of the silent Strath-Oykel and the widening Kyle of Sutherland, dulled with hurrying showers and glittering out again to the sun; she knew of the desert moorland wastes, the featureless miles and miles, that lay between Lairg and Ben Armin Forest; she, too, a wandering maiden, had been 'on Loch Loyal's side, and up by Mudal Water.' And also she had been to Alt-na-Traive, where the deep cobalt of the loch grows deeper and stronger under the impending gloom of Ben Clebrig; and in the white snow-time she had watched the hinds and their calves come down to the edge of the bays, careless of mankind; if any trace of mankind there were in those remote solitudes. It was not at Invernish, and its precipitous and wooded banks, and its broad river, and the Cathedral just below her, that she was now looking; there were wider, and larger, and more lonely scenes spread out before her rapt gaze.

And perhaps there may be something pathetic even in mere distance—some recalling of other hours, with all their abandoned and wistful hopes; or perhaps she had overstrained her sight, in trying to pierce the dim masses of Ben Wyvis and reach the more solitary regions of the north; but at all events her eyes—the eyes like the blue of the sea-wave—had filled with tears; and very impatient and angry with herself was she that such should be the

case; and when she heard the footsteps of someone approaching, she would not admit by any furtive touch of a pocket handkerchief, that she had been near to crying; no, she would brave it out, whoever the stranger might be; and doubtless he would go by without impertinent observation. Well, when she turned to continue on her way, she found the newcomer to be none other than Archie Gilchrist; and instantly she advanced to meet him with great sprightliness and cheerfulness; and her eyes, wide open, were fixed upon him as if she dared him to say there was anything unusual about the brimming lashes.

"I saw you on the Castle hill, Eelin," he said, "and I guessed you might have come in here." Then a quick look of alarm sprang into his face, and he seemed to draw back. "Oh, but I am intruding," he said, anxiously. "Perhaps you would rather be alone—"

"Oh, no, indeed," said she, with a wonderful blitheness. "I would rather walk with you, as far as the Castle hill at least; then I must get home. My eyes," she continued, smiling, "can't stand the glare from those white clouds; isn't it fearful this morning?" And now the handkerchief was applied to the wet lashes; and presently she had resumed her gay talk.

"I am delighted to see you looking so well," she said to him. "I was afraid the worry and responsibility of becoming editor-in-chief of the *Observer* would be making an old man of you. But it appears to have been as easy as taking command of the Swiss fleet."

And yet he was not wholly deceived.

"Eelin," said he, in a troubled way, "are you sure I haven't forced myself upon you? Don't you want to go home by yourself? I am very sorry—if I overtook you when you were not expecting anyone——"

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" said she, goodhumouredly; and she put her hand within his arm (for the first time) so that they really did look like a couple of engaged lovers, under this archway of trembling and swaying leaves, with all the wide-receding, brilliant landscape stretching away from them to the high horizon. "I am most anxious to hear about what has recently happened, and what your immediate plans are. Was the change of government effected without a revolution of any kind? Have you

bestowed away all your patronage, without leaving a single malcontent? Is the Invernish *Observer* going to set the Moray Firth on fire?"

And now he began to think he must have been mistaken. After all, there was a decided glare from the resplendent clouds and from the flying sunshine that burned along the green uplands across the river. And then again, perhaps the beautiful eyes, those deep-radiant eyes, were themselves sensitive to light? Anyhow he began (while the touch of her hand on his arm thrilled him to imaginative forecasts) to tell her all he meant to do in his new sphere and condition. And she was so interested, and sympathetic, and cheerfully or mockingly appreciative (according to her wayward moods and impulses, that nevertheless were of an open friendship) that the Friars' Walk, and the steep banks of foliage beneath it, and the glimpses of mountain and sea through the pendulous branches became all glorified to him, on this strange morning. Friars' Walk? It should have been called Lovers' Lane; for it is lovers who go through leafy and sun-bespreckled pathways, when the sounds of the great world they have left behind them are scarcely to be made out on the listening breeze.

"Of course," said he (and he wished the Friars' Walk were five miles long), "I don't magnify my office. The *Observer* is only a minor provincial paper; I know that well enough. But good writing tells, and carries far, if you can get it; and that is what I must try to do. And I have projects, you know," he continued, with increasing animation (for here he was on safe ground, without dread of wounding susceptibilities; and he would rather have her understand that the linking of hand and arm meant nothing to him at all; that she need not fear any reciprocal advance—no, not until she herself gave him the invitation). "I have projects, you know; I must try to make the paper as little provincial as possible. I must try to appeal to as wide a circle as possible. I may succeed or I may not. I am very ignorant. But Grieve helps me at every turn; and he has had plenty of experience. One of these projects, for example, is a series of papers on certain persons whom the public for its own protection and peace, must immediately jump upon and exterminate. I have been in communication with a member of the Assassins' Club in Piccadilly——"

"What club?" she asked, in wonder.

"The Assassins' Club, they call it, though it has another name," he went on, eagerly glad to interest her in anything, however trivial. "The Club, so they tell me, consists chiefly of literary bravoes, who hire themselves out to slay any man's reputation, and sometimes they will do it at ten-and-six a column and sometimes they want two guineas. Well, it isn't a very honourable calling; but then, when necessary, you employ scavengers and dustmen; and in this case there is some justification, for we ought to have the road swept clear before we enter the coming century. Indeed," he said, laughing, "I have got in my pocket the introductory articles of my series; and I could read you a sentence or two just to show you the kind of thing." He brought out a small package of MS. and began: "'Against Mr. —— we have no particular objection to urge, as he stands on the steps of the Athenæum Club, buttoning his frock-coat over his portly form, and revolving in his mind what further he can say to the twenty-seven old idiots to whom he annually lectures on French philosophy; but when he has the arrogance to occupy columns in the public prints with oracular preachings about the books that Englishmen and Englishwomen ought to read, then we begin to inquire what are the qualifications enjoyed by this pragmatical person that he should presume to dictate in any such matter.' Then there begins," continued Gilchrist, with a demure giggle, "an analysis of the pretentious trash 'this person' has himself written—scornful enough, you may be sure; but I won't bore you with that. I would rather read you the beginning of another one: 'Given a disappointed elderly spinster, living in the outskirts of a foreign town, shunned by men and cut by women: to find the value of her furious denunciations of English fashionable society'——"

Wild Eelin's face had grown grave.

"Archie," said she, interrupting him, "I don't like that kind of thing at all. It isn't dignified. No; nor is it dignified in you to hire a bravo—doubtless an anonymous bravo, skulking in the dark. If you object to the arrogance of those people, or to their ignorance, or to their thrusting themselves into notice, why should you yourself not deal with them?"

"I can't write like the fellows at that Club," he answered her; "they have been trained to it."

"At least you would write with a proper courtesy, and reticence, and self-respect," she contended.

"And never get quoted," said he, ruefully. "I was thinking of the paper. What I have read to you is a specimen of the sort of thing the public likes nowadays."

"Well, I wouldn't pander to any such liking," said she, distinctly. "If I were you, I should think of myself first, and the paper afterwards."

Why, it was an injunction! The hapless series was doomed. And Archie Gilchrist was for a moment considering what compensation he should have to pay to the member of the Assassins' Club when alas! these two arrived at the wooden turnstile, and the lad-and-lass attitude had to be abandoned, for in passing from under the arch of foliage out into the wide open thoroughfare, they seemed to have returned to the world again, with its suspicious scrutiny. And yet the most agitated prude might have been reassured if only she could have heard the conversation that took place between the two lovers as they strolled along the Friars' Walk. It was not such as lovers are wont to use.

Then when they came to the parting of their ways, the tall, flaxen-haired young Editor held on towards the town, while she sped off home. She was in one of her gay moods, it was as if she were rejoicing in some undefined sensation of release. She was chanting to herself—not singing, but rhythmically reciting so that the words should fall in with the swing of her boyish stride—all kinds of snatches of Jacobite minstrelsy—

'Wha the deil hae we gotten for a King,
But a wee, wee German lairdie!'

and there was a splendid disdain in her tone now and again—

'The very dogs o' England's court
Can bark and howl in German!'

And then when she came to the upper suspension-bridge she descried, in the blinding silver of the stream, a tiny black speck; and she knew that was old Fergus patiently thrashing away at the unresponsive pools; so she walked quickly along the bank, and before going into the house she called jeeringly to him—

"Why don't you howk him out, Fergus?"

The answer was unexpected.

"I've just lost one, Miss Eelin."

"Oh, well now!" she called again, in accents of deep and sincere disappointment. "That was a shame! And you so persevering. But never mind—there's more where that one came from. And you know I wish you good luck anyway."

"I'm sure you do that, Miss Eelin," was the last reply that came from the baggy man out in the river, as she turned to go in at the gate.

She reported herself to her mother, who was in the drawing-room.

"And I had a bit of a walk with Archie Gilchrist, Mummie," she went on, briskly. "Oh, I can tell you his enthusiasm over the duties of his new post, and his various projects, is quite delightful. It is so full of hope and courage. The responsibilities don't frighten him a bit. And I think he will make himself heard. His eyes have always been fixed on a wide horizon; I could see that even in the 'Fairfax' papers. Then what an enjoyment it must be to a young man to have such opportunities—to know that he can exert influence—it is a wonderful position for a young man——"

"Eelin," said her mother, laying down her work, and regarding the girl steadily, "have you ever considered the how and why of his gaining that position? Have you ever asked yourself how a shrewd business man like Somerled Macdonald came to hand over such a stupendous gift to a young fellow of whom he knew next to nothing?"

"Why, you know as well as I, Mummie!" the girl exclaimed. "Both he and his father would tell you that he had been 'brought up in the faith,' that is their phrase. From his infancy he has been educated into a romantic devotion to the House of Kinvaig; and in his eyes we are its representatives; and then he comes over here, and finds that I am engaged to a young man who is not well off, and what he says to the young man is: 'Here, take this to better your position; and you can't refuse it, because it is Miss Macdonald's dowry.' Archie told me so."

"Eelin," said the mother, "that is all very well and very specious. But what I know is, looking at the

extraordinary situation of affairs—what I am sure of is that Somerled Macdonald is either mad or madly in love; and if he is madly in love, it is with you!"

The girl gave a piteous little cry.

"Mother, mother, how can you say such things! Is it fair? Why, he never threw a word or a look in my direction! Of course not! He is too proud—to think of any one like me. And then—then—he knew I was promised away; and—and—an honourable man would not seek—would not seek to come between engaged people—any more than between married people. He never had a thought or a look for me—of course not—he is far too proud to think of any one so insignificant—and out of the world—and useless; and besides—besides—he knew that I had promised myself away—he knew that——"

She had gone to the open French window, and was looking out, so that her mother should not see her trembling lips as she uttered the incoherent sentences; and yet she held her head high, and her hands were clenched at her side, so that there should be no other sign, even to herself. And then she took a turn or two in the garden; and still she held her head high; and now her lips were no longer trembling; there was something of a haughty and independent air about the fine-featured Highland face. Her wayward moods were of short duration—or she could make them appear to be so. When she went back into the drawing-room, she called to her mother—

"Come away, now, Mummie, darling, and let us choose the shade for your bonnet. I'm going to trim it myself, you know; I won't let Mrs. Rogart interfere. And if I make a guy of you, you can tell me where to go—and Beelzebub will conduct me."

But the relations between those two can best be described by the following scrap of conversation. As they were engaged in their millinery studies, the mother said—

"Now look here, Eelin, one thing I must impress on you, and that is, when I am gone, you shall not wear black for me. Will you remember? Any colour you like—but not black. I warn you not to wear black for me; for if you do, I'll come back and thrash you!"

"I'll take that thrashing, Mummie," said Wild Eelin, "—and welcome!"

CHAPTER XL.

PERSISTERARE.

THE next morning threatened to be showery: a cab was telephoned for to come out from the town; and Mrs. Macdonald set out on a series of business-calls, which eventually landed her in front of a bookseller's shop in Union-street. Now Union-street is a very short thoroughfare, in which any one can easily be descried; and Lord Mountmahon, happening to come out from the railway-station at this moment, perceived the Bean-an-Tighearn just as she was crossing the pavement. That was enough. He instantly set off in pursuit. At letter-writing he was not very excellent; but face-to-face with any one he could give a good account of himself, or he thought he could. And his sense of injury—of manifold injuries—quickened his step.

Meanwhile the Lady of the House of Kinvaig had entered the shop, and nodded to the two young damsels behind the counter, who were particular friends of hers. They, however, chanced to be engaged with several customers; accordingly she took a seat at the central table; and began to look at photographs. So here was Mountmahon's opportunity.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Macdonald," he began, in a most hurt and reproachful fashion, the moment he drew near, "I do think you have treated me very badly. You now say in your letter that your daughter is engaged to be married. But why wasn't I told before?"

"It is quite a recent engagement," Eelin's mother answered, looking very much distressed—for who could tell what scraps of this conversation might not reach the

people standing at the counter? "And besides no one imagined that it could be of the slightest concern to you."

"And neither it is!" he said, with bluff good nature. "Of course not! An engagement can always be broken where there is sufficient inducement; and I am offering your daughter a very good inducement—oh, yes, pretty tolerable, don't you make any mistake. And I never yet met the man or woman who would stick at trifles where there was sufficient inducement—never once, during my toddle through this old rag-and-bone shop of a world. It's each one for himself or herself, and why not? It's human nature. It's born in your blood and bone. And if it comes to that, I have found that the she's are ever so much more wide awake to their own interests than the he's. A man will do madly generous things where a woman is concerned; and the woman will pick the last farthing out of his pocket. I'm a bit of a philosopher, you must understand: I've seen life, I've kept my eyes open. I'm not such a sop, you know. I've had experience of people. I know their ways. I'm not often sharped—unless it's over gee-gees; and I've told you already I mean to get rid of my blessed assortment of old horse-hair trunks if a certain event is likely to come off. Persisterare—that's my motto. There may be obstacles; but obstacles were just stuck up for you to take them clean and clever; and whether it's hurdles or the water-jump, you get there in the end. I'm not a young man from the country. And in the present case, my dear lady, allow me to say that I really think you owe me a little compensation, for the way I've been knocked about and jockeyed. And what shall it be? Well, tell me the name of the happy man who at present imagines he is going to marry your daughter."

The constraint and embarrassment visible in the face of the gentle-born and gentle-bred lady had not been unnoticed; and the elder of the two sisters behind the counter, having now got rid of her customers, would very much like to have interfered, so obvious was the persecution. But what could she do? If she had asked Mrs. Macdonald to step into their private parlour, Mountmahon would have followed: there was no surplus of shyness about the young man. And indeed the Bean-an-Tighearn considered that

the best way of getting rid of him was to answer his questions, however impertinent; and so she said quietly—

"My daughter is engaged to Mr. Gilchrist, the Editor of the Invernish *Observer*."

"Oh," said he, in joyful surprise, "is that all? Only a newspaper fellow? Oh, that's all right! That's all right. Newspaper-fellows can always be squared, if you go the right way about it. Her ladyship, poor dear girl, was awfully clever at it; she could twist them round her finger; it was lovely to look on and admire. But even she got tricked once—yes, she did: an American chap—correspondent of a London newspaper—I forget his name, but I remember his ugly mug—well, he was in Scotland, and we asked him to come across for a day or two's stalking—not that he could go stalking any more than a cow—bless you, an hour on the hill would have burst the breath out of his body! But we knew that an invitation to join our house-party would just make him dotty with pride; and the fact is her ladyship wanted some information about certain American securities. The man came—hung about the place—but not a word could we get of him that was of the least use to us; and the next we heard of him was that he had written an article in some New York journal, describing the people in the house, and the ways of the house, and even the furniture in the house, down to the jug that brought him his hot water in the morning, because the jug had a coronet painted on it! Well, never mind, Mrs. Macdonald; once bitten, twice shy; and we've had dealings with other newspaper-men, and they're not such bad fellows when you take them the right way. And you'll see that I'll get this chap squared, and hushed up, and sent off. You trust to me. It's for your daughter's advantage, I make bold to think. When I take an idea into my head, I generally hold on to it; and I generally succeed in the end—yes, I do. You trust to me. Gilchrist, did you say? Gilchrist? Why, not the lanky, straw-haired bounder I met one day at your house. Oh, that's all, is it? And the Invernish *Observer* office, did you say? Very well. That's quite right. That's perfectly right. You trust to me. And we'll either get the weather of this newspaper-chap, or by the Lord Harry we'll run clean through him!"

At this moment Mrs. Macdonald perceived that the elder of the two young ladies behind the counter was now disengaged, and she rose from her seat and went over to her, hoping to find refuge in inquiries about the new magazines. But the podgy young man in the yellow Newmarket coat and brown billycock hat followed her.

"Don't let me intrude—hanged if I would intrude on anybody," said he—but he was obviously in great spirits, and inclined to be communicative, and friendly, and garrulous. "Only one word more. I must really tell you what happened to me yesterday. A revelation—by gad! Well, the long and the short of the story is that in the afternoon I went out to see Miss Eelin herself, to ask her about your letter and its flabbergastin announcement. I hadn't got to Glengarva House, I had only got as far as General Mallock's house, when I chanced to look through the railings, and there was lawn-tennis going on in the front garden. And who but Miss Eelin was there!—oh, my heavens, all the goddesses on Mount Olympus—or Mount Marathon—or wherever it was—all of them boiled together couldn't have equalled the grace of her skipping about. Oh, my heavens, I never saw anything like it! Why, she danced!—she literally danced all the time! When she served a ball she went back a bit and then gave a little tripping dance forward; and when she ran to overtake a nasty one, it was a kind of tripping dance; and when she ran back to her station, it was all a dancing movement—I tell you, I never saw anything like it for grace—and—and—laughing enjoyment! Oh! why can't we remain always young like that?" continued the philosopher; and then he said more darkly: "Of course I couldn't go into the garden to speak with her; for General Mallock and I don't quite hit it off; he has said some things about me that were most uncalled for; and I wouldn't enter his door. But that didn't hinder my looking through the fence—and they couldn't see me either—and I give you my word it was a raree-show fit for a Prince of the blood royal! Why, she looked so tall—was that the plaiting of her skirts?—anyhow, they hung admirably; and when she sprang to catch a ball high in air you could see the perfect outlines of her figure—oh, my heavens, talk of the Empire or the Troc—they're not in it! And I put it to you now—I put it to you straight—can

you be surprised at my admiration? Well, admiration isn't the word—call it infatuation, blind infatuation, if you like—for we only live once. And can you be surprised at my persistency? But look at the splendid prize I have in view: you, as her mother, must admit that; don't you think I am justified in persevering—even with deuced little encouragement? Ah, but wait a bit. You'll see whether I can manage affairs or not. I have a way, you know. I'm not a boastful ass; but on the other hand, I'm not a sop. However, I fear I'm interrupting your purchases, Mrs. Macdonald; awfully sorry; rather an enticing subject, you know; gracious heavens, such a picture she was—all in white, except for the blue Tam o' Shanter—like summer come back again, and dancing on the green—and her small brown boots twinkling all over the grass like butterflies. Yes, they did. Oh, you needn't be shamefaced about it. You are her mother; you ought to be proud of such a splendid and bewitching creature—so lithe, and lissom, and—and—laughing all over the place. No hand-dog mouths for her, I warrant! Why, she is too well made to be sulky! It's only ill-made women who are sulky—women who are broken about the waist and in-kneed. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Macdonald. You shall hear from me—and soon, I reckon. Keep up your heart: the world's young yet!" And therewith he took his leave.

But he had not far to go in order to pay his next call. He went straight to the office of the Invernish *Observer*. He sent in his name; and was asked to walk up-stairs; the Editor would see him. And he advanced into the room with a propitiatory grin on his rotund features: he did not anticipate much trouble.

"Greatly obliged to you, Mr. Gilchrist," said he, as he seated himself close to the editorial desk, "for you must be a very busy man; and what I have come about may occupy a little of your time. And yet why should it? Life is life; and we are no longer children. No; let us look at this affair like two men of the world. You know who I am; I can pay my way; and I generally get what I want. You, on the other hand, have a very honourable position—oh, distinctly so—it's not for me to question the power of the press—especially when they describe my hot-water jugs—but you know, between ourselves, you can't be making a

very good thing out of this miserable local newspaper. It's not to be expected, now is it?"

Archie Gilchrist regarded the young man calmly and curiously, not quite sure what to do with him. He had only consented to admit him because of the chance meeting in Glengarva House; otherwise, the general reputation which his lordship bore might have proved a bar; to say nothing of a far more subtle antagonism that had been aroused on the occasion of the Highland gathering. And yet there was something about the potboy's friendly and confidential manner that rather disarmed resentment.

"Now let's play frank and fair, Mr. Gilchrist," he continued, in the most goodhumoured fashion. "There are no witnesses. If I have a proposal to make, and you don't like it, you can chuck it, and no harm done—quite simple."

"But what is this proposal?" said Gilchrist, with some impatience.

"Well, as I understand, you are engaged to be married to Miss Eelin Macdonald," his lordship said, bluntly enough; but when he saw that Gilchrist's brows had instantly contracted, he was quick to guard himself against the coming charge of impertinence. "Oh, but listen. I have her mother's word for it. I was talking to her mother only a few minutes ago, and it's in consequence of that conversation that I'm here. And what I want to point out to you—oh, hang it, I wish I had the gift of the gab—I hope I'm not going to blunder this transaction—after all it's rather delicate—yes, it is, devilish delicate. I say, couldn't you give me a glass of some fizzing stuff—champagne, or soda-water, or anything—to clear my brain for a moment?"

"I'm afraid there's nothing of the kind in the office," Gilchrist answered. "But why can't you say at once what it is you want? What is this proposal? And you'll succeed better if you leave Miss Macdonald's name out of the question altogether."

"I can't very well do that," said the podgy young man, with a sort of imbecile laugh. "For it's about Miss Macdonald that the whole question turns. Hang it, where's my brain going? When her ladyship was alive, she used to say, 'Now, Mounty, brace up!' and that put me on my mettle, don't you know, and I had another try at getting this old coal-scuttle of a head of mine to work. Very well;

here goes. The fact is, Mr. Gilchrist, you are a very lucky fellow; you are engaged to an uncommonly fetching girl; my goodness, I needn't tell you, you know! And to think of waltzing with such a glorious creature—'The Blue Danube,' the 'Toreador,' any of them makes one's head reel; but you must recognise after all, my good friend, that a lucky engagement isn't everything in life. You are a young man, and you have your way to make before you; I am a young man, but I've had my way made for me—and if it has been a devil of a mess hitherto, well, I am responsible: I own to that. But still, here I am. And the question is, are you prepared to be a reasonable person? Plump and plain, will you accept some consideration—some handsome consideration—and yet reasonable, you know—reasonable—I say, will you accept some handsome compensation to back out of this engagement, so as to leave me installed in your place? That's the idea. That's the project. And you needn't get waxy about it, for you can chuck it if you like. But as two men of the world, I think we should be acting in a sensible way if we came to terms. We're not children, or sentimental jackasses of schoolgirls. I can make it worth your while. Oh, you needn't look so waxy—why, man, it's a matter of business—if you don't like it you can lump it, only I hope you won't be such a horrible fool——"

All of a sudden the expression of Archie Gilchrist's face changed: the amazement, and indignation, and wrath went clean out of it.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Lord Mountmahon," said he, quite simply and humbly; "I was forgetting. You said you had just been speaking to Mrs. Macdonald. And perhaps it is with her authority—or perhaps it is even with her daughter's sanction—that you put this suggestion before me?"

"No, I can't say that, I can't say that," Mountmahon honestly confessed. "But I thought it was a reasonable thing, for every one concerned."

At this the big grey eyes began to burn.

"Then am I to understand that this insolent proposal has entirely arisen out of your own ignorant presumption?"

"I tell you I thought it was a reasonable thing!" his

lordship pleaded—but he did not like the look of the young man in the editorial chair.

Archie Gilchrist rose and strode to the door, and when he had opened it wide, he said :

"Out!"

His lordship also rose ; but there was still some protest left in him.

"Oh, don't be a horrible fool!" he said.

"Out!" came the menacing monosyllable again.

"You are making a horrible mistake, you know—you'll think better of it afterwards——"

"Out!"

Then as there was clearly and obviously and ominously the danger of a parting kick, the crapulous idiot did leave the room—his pasty face white with passion ; and how he made his way along the rather dusky corridor and down the corkscrew stair did not in the least matter to Archie Gilchrist—who had returned to his desk, with his hands all trembling ; he had exercised an admirable self-control.

And all ablaze with execration and anathema was the soul of Lord Mountmahon as he walked back into Union-street and along to the railway station. He was not used to be treated in this manner. Moreover he rather prided himself on his diplomatic gifts ; the truth being that any luck he ever had experienced in escaping from trouble had been due to the nimble wit of his wife, the poor lass from the music halls who had come to an untimely end in the river Garva. He was furious over his failure. He cursed a mongrel cur that ran between his legs. "No, no!" he said, angrily, to a cabman who offered his services. And at last he reached the refreshment room of the station, where, as he had anticipated, he found his bullet-headed and broken-nosed fraternity carousing.

Yes, here they were, the whole half-dozen of them, at a table occupied by themselves ; and 'More ham-sandwiches —more champagne!' was their cry, while the heavy jowls worked assiduously. Mountmahon regarded the crew of them with open contempt.

"It's all you're fit for, you guzzling gang! Why on earth I should ever have thought of bringing you to the Highlands I can't think! What do you do for me?"

"Look here, guvnor," said one of them, sulkily, "can't

we 'ave a 'oliday, once in a while? What's the good o' kicking our 'eels at Bridge of Kinvaig, when you've sent heverybody away, and there's no tips and no nothing?"

"And not a bloomin' quid for the last three weeks!" said another—for the Pretorian guard was obviously in revolt.

"And we've kep quiet about all them turf things a mighty long time: we've got to be paid, or the bloomin fat'll be in the bloomin fire," said another of the bullet-heads, whose appearance might have been a little more prepossessing if his white paper collar had not got burst, with one end up at his left ear.

Mountmahon drew in a chair, and sate down.

"A pretty lot you are!" he said, bitterly. "I've fed you and pampered you until you've gone clean out of your wits. And if there should be a few sovereigns overdue, have you ever found me fail in the end? And here you are gormandising fit to bring on sunstroke; and here am I, just been insulted to my face, and ordered out of an office by a miserable newspaper-fellow—"

"Oh, I say, guvnor, we're not going to stand that!" exclaimed another of the bullet-heads, whose tightly-tied blue neckerchief seemed suggestive of apoplexy. "No, we won't. You've done us bloomin well since we came to this country—and I'll hammer the inside out of any man as says you aint. Well, give us the name o' this feller. Just let's hear about him. Do you want us to leave a card on him and ask about his 'ealth?"

"I want you to gouge his eyes out!" said Mountmahon, gloomily. "But of course you won't. You'd rather lob-lolly about these refreshment-rooms, and stuff yourselves until you can't stir. Why did I bring you to the Highlands?"

"Because ye couldn't 'elp it," said one of them, grinning over a glass of champagne.

"Shut up, Conky—you're a hideous cad and that's what you are," said the one who had spoken before. "And what I will maintain is that his lordship has done us bloomin' well; and that we're bound to play this little game for him, especially as we're sniggling off to the South. His name, guv'nor! That's all we want. We'll find out the rest—and how we can set about to nick him. Bless you,

we'll paint his figger-head for him that his own mother wouldn't recognise him. Cheer up, guvnor!—ain't like you to be down in the mouth. 'Ave some fizz—'ave a sangwich—that's right!—and you see if we don't give him a drilling—the bloomin' cheek of the pig!"

CHAPTER XLI.

AN EXPEDITION.

THERE came alarming news from the north—though there was no intention to alarm. It was Somerled Macdonald who wrote; and the occasion was his acknowledgement of the receipt of the tradesmen's bills that Eelin had sent him. A formal acknowledgement it was too; she could detect no resentment in his tone; he merely said he was sorry she had taken the trouble. Then he went on: 'I regret to add that my father has been, and is, seriously ill. He appears to have caught an attack of influenza just before leaving Invernish; and the exposure of the long drive from Lairg did him harm. Of course I would not otherwise bother you with our poor affairs; but he has put it on me by way of command; and so I obey. His constant cry is to be permitted, before he dies, once more to hear the voice of her ladyship, and your own voice, Miss Macdonald; and as he cannot be moved at present, he keeps asking whether there is no chance of your coming round here within the next week or two; he says you spoke as if you were familiar with the neighbourhood, and sometimes visited it. Please do not attach too much importance to these half-delirious pinings of an invalid. For myself, I could not dream of begging your mother and you to undertake such a journey. Far from it. We are strangers to you. We have trespassed on your kindness too much already—ever since we came to this country indeed. And I am writing now merely because I promised to write; for it is not easy to gainsay a blind man. And perhaps the best plan would be for you to reply nothing at all; then he would assume you had gone away to the South. In any case I most humbly apologise for having so far taken up your time and

attention; and the unanswered letter need not give you another thought.'

When Eelin Macdonald read those lines her face was hot, her hands were trembling; and fifteen different resolutions rushed through her brain in as many consecutive seconds. Then quickly she carried the offending missive into the drawing-room; and her last mood was of indignation.

"Look here, mother, did you ever see such insolence!" she exclaimed. "His stand-offishness is nothing less than insolence! It is pride—a low-born pride—the self-conscious pride of the democrat. Of course I'm very sorry for the poor old man; but as for the son—he seems to think we are blackbeetles simply because he is a democrat—"

"The poor old man—yes, indeed—in that solitary inn," the Bean-an-Tighearn repeated, as she scanned these pages. "Well, I must go. It may be a mere sentimental attachment he has to the House of Kinvaig; but that is something; in these days loyalty of any kind is rare enough. Then he has been more than generous towards us—and so has his son, though he does not seem to have found favour in your eyes. Now write out a telegram, Eelin, so that a waggonette may be waiting for me at Lairg to-morrow at one o'clock—"

"You will take Jane with you, mother!" the girl protested—and still her face was flushed and still she held her head high.

"Oh, no, not at all—it is quite unnecessary," was the answer.

Wild Eelin hesitated for a second or so.

"Mummie, you're not going all that way alone!—all the way to Alt-na-Traive!" she pleaded; and therewith, for no apparent reason whatever, she burst out crying.

"Eelin, have you taken leave of your senses!" the mother said, in wonder. "Of course you can come with me if you like. Only you seemed to think—"

"Yes, and I still think it!" she said, in the same indignant tone. "That letter is insolent with pride. We are not blackbeetles. And Somerled Macdonald is not the Maker of the Universe. He may be able to construct railways; but he is not the Maker of the Universe. Do you think Archie Gilchrist would have written that letter? Archie Gilchrist is a gentleman by nature and education,

But when you come to the self-conscious pride of the democrat—— "

"Eelin Macdonald," said her mother, deliberately, "I ask you again, are you out of your senses altogether? This letter is most respectful—respectful to the verge of humility. And it is most kind and considerate, trying to meet your wishes in every possible direction. However, if you think of going with me, you need only see old Mr. Macdonald. Somerled Macdonald, if I know anything about him, is not likely to thrust himself in your way."

"Of course not!" she said—and still her face was hot—and still she kept her head high—"the self-conscious pride of the democrat will hold him aloof—even although we did try our best to pay his father and him a little attention when they were in Invernish." And straightway she turned her back, and marched to the wall of the room, and stood silently contemplating the great family tree, with its sixpenny dots of names stuck on the branches—Angus Og, Lord of the Isles—Donald, Lord of the Isles, Earl of Ross—Ranald Macdonell, Earl of Antrim—John Macdonell of Glengarry—Alexander Macdonell of Keppoch—Aeneas Gorm Macdonald of Kinvaig—and all the rest of them; and perhaps it was to console her wounded dignity with the thought that she was the Daughter of a thousand Thanes; and perhaps it was merely to hide the fact that she had to dry her eyes. The mortified vanity of the wretch! And next she sate down and wrote a most affectionate letter to Archie Gilchrist, asking him to come to the station next morning, to bid them good-bye.

The following day broke wild and louring, with dark masses of cloud rolling in from the west, with heavy downpours from time to time, and yet with sudden rifts of a vivid blue and an equally sudden blaze of silver to send dazzling reflections down on the flooded and sweeping river. The hills were perpetually changing; those nearest at hand for the most part sombre and ominous, their serrated outlines black against the windy skies; those in the south of a paler hue amid the shifting greys; but ever and anon one of them would recede behind a mystic veil of rain that stole across the landscape, obliterating every well-known feature in its gradual and soft approach. The long branches of the elms and limes beyond the tennis-

lawn were bending before the blast; now and again a golden leaf whirled away to go floating down on the stream. The sea-gulls were high in air, circling and screaming; the excitement of the storm was upon them. Altogether it was not a propitious morning for setting out for the North; but both the Bean-an-Tighearn and her daughter were pretty well indifferent to the vagaries of the Highland weather; and besides this was no mere holiday jaunt.

And here at the station was Archie Gilchrist, and furiously blushing was he when he presented Mrs. Macdonald with a very pretty bouquet—for the young man was not accustomed to figure in these little politenesses. He was more at home when he handed Miss Eelin an envelope.

"You will find some verses inside," he said to her, laughing. "The last sigh of the swan. You see, it would never do for the Editor of a paper to appear in his own poet's-corner; so when you see Mr. Somerled Macdonald, you may tell him that he has crushed a bard who might one day have had his bust in Westminster Abbey. It is Bimetallism that Mr. Grieve and I have to deal with, and Ensilage, and the Triple Alliance, and a few matters of that kind: we have no time for twittering. Westminster Abbey must wait."

Which was all very proper and modest; but none the less, the moment the train had left the station, Miss Eelin took out the page of note-paper, and this was the scrap of rhyme she found there:

O Mary—Mary Averiel—
Why did you go from me?—
And why did you break the promise
You made beside the sea?

I gave you all I could, dearest—
A song—or two or three;
And sweet were the nights of betrothal
Down by the side of the sea.

And no ill-will I bear you,
Wherever you may be:
But I wonder if sometimes you think of
The dark nights down by the sea.

She handed over the bit of MS.

"Now, mother, has that the true ring—or has it not?"

Her mother glanced at the verses.

"It is merely a reminiscence of Heine," she said, with

a certain air of indifference. "And look at the construction: 'think of' at the end of a line is impossible!"

"A reminiscence of Heine? And if that were so, what better could there be?" the daughter warmly contended. "Ah, but you are always unjust to Archie Gilchrist. Always unfair to him. And why—why? You may say that his manners are a little bit unformed; and certainly he has not had the benefit of a college education: it is all the more credit to him that he has won to the front, or will win to the front. And don't you believe what he said in the station about abandoning his ambitions and sinking into the soft easy-chair of a provincial newspaper. Not at all. Not a bit. I know him better than he knows himself. There is a fire within him that is not quenched yet, even though his lines have fallen in pleasant places. And no thanks to Somerled Macdonald! If Somerled Macdonald had done his best to ruin this young man's future, he could not have made a stronger effort; but he has not succeeded. The fire is there—whether the end is to be Westminster Abbey or not. And I know for one thing that the rhythm of these little verses is true. It matches on. I can hear it all through the movement of this railway carriage.

'O Mary—Mary Averiel'—

It's all right—it's true——"

"Eelin," said her mother, plaintively, "I have no such prejudice against Mr. Gilchrist as you seem to imagine. But I suppose these lines were written about you. And a stranger might ask whether you had been in the habit of wandering along the seashore at night with a young man."

"And if any stranger asked that of me," she said, proudly, "I should tell him that my name was Eelin Macdonald, and that kindly people sometimes added 'of Kinvaig.' That would be the answer—and a sufficient one, I hope."

They were now emerging into a more spacious world, and the skies were clearing. They crossed the Beauly river, its splendid current driving along in hues of deep cobalt. The plantations and clearances of the Black Isle shone in the sun. They came in sight of the wide waters of the Cromarty Firth, with here and there a schooner anchored in the shallows, and here and there a string of wild duck whirring

out to the sea. Ben Wyvis was blue and pale and distant; the clouds were lifting all around. Then up by Tain, and Bonar, and Lairg: was it a fancy that the air was sweeter here—that the mountains and the larch-woods and the long undulations of heather gave one a nobler sense of life? Loch Shin, with its bays and wooded promontories, looked like fairy-land; but they did not linger very long at Lairg; a waggonette was waiting for them, and they were bound for the wildernesses of the North. Mile after mile across the desolate moor they drove; and now in the basking sunlight all signs of life seemed to have disappeared; not even a butterfly fluttered along the endless wastes of peathag and ling. And then when they reached the heights they had a range of mountains within view which are worth the naming for old sake's sake—Craig Vôr in Ben Armin Forest, Clebrich above Loch Naver, Ben Hee in the Reay Forest, Ben Hope in the Kinloch Forest, Ben Loyal the Hill of the Calves. Every one of them she knew; she had wandered about these remote solitudes when she was a very small lass, making friends with the keepers; she had even been privileged to peep into the sanctuaries, when no one else was allowed to approach. For although, properly speaking, the Reay country is the land of the Mackays, there was not a man in all the lone territory who would not have been proud to become the slave of the slim, free-stepping, wide-eyed creature who was the representative of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig.

This was all very well; but now as they began to descend from the heights—from the vast cerulean panorama towards the little hamlet of Alt-na-Traive—the young lady in the waggonette appeared to have lost the self-composure of the tiny maid who had wandered along the Mudal banks. She was perturbed, anxious, apprehensive; if one of the horses kicked a stone and made a bit of a stumble, she grasped the wooden rail behind her as if she feared they were all going to be flung into chaos; she had no eyes for the windy stretches of the loch, or the gloom and shine of the hills; and at last she said, in a kind of frantic despair—

"Mummie, would you mind going on alone! It's you that Mr. Macdonald wants to meet. I can walk back to Lairg——"

"Three-and-twenty miles!"

"It's nothing—I can do it easily!" she exclaimed. "I will wait for you at Lairg. You see, we have been living such a quiet life at Glengarva House that I'm not used to going among strangers——"

"Strangers, Eelin!"

"Yes, indeed. He said so in the insulting letter he sent us yesterday. He said that they were strangers to us. Very well. Let them remain so. I don't mind. And—and—I would rather walk back to Lairg. Three-and-twenty miles? —that's nothing! And to-morrow I shall be waiting for you there; and I shall have a nice luncheon ready for you, after your long drive; and—and I shall be waiting for you there——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, child!" the mother said, severely. "Are you afraid there may be some sorrow to be faced? You will have more of that before your term of life is over. And even at the very worst—and we have no right to anticipate the worst—Mr. Macdonald is full of years and honour; and the greatest honour that could befall him now—well I know it—is that you should take him by the hand and call him your friend. Is that so much for him to ask? Is it anything at all for you to grant? And you are not going to prove coward at the last moment!"

The girl was abashed and humiliated. All that she could say—mostly to herself—was "I could have walked the three-and-twenty miles easily enough."

And then again she became proud and combative.

"There's some one out on the loch," said her mother. "I hope it is Somerled Macdonald; for that would mean that his father is better—"

But Miss Eelin would not look. She pretended to be listening.

"Why, I hear the ring of it in the carriage wheels—in the tramp of the horses: it has the throb and rhythm of existence in it—"

"Now what are you talking about?" asked the bewildered mother.

"Well, about the little piece of verse you seemed to despise," was the rejoinder (and she would not turn her head towards the loch, where a boat, with a fisherman and two gillies in it, was slowly being taken round the bays). "'O Mary—Mary Averiel'—it has the true ring. My dear

mother, you should read Herbert Spencer on 'The Rhythm of Motion.' It is a great natural law. And these lines are in accordance—I can hear them in the horses' hoofs——"

"Eelin, Eelin," the meek mother protested, "how can you be so absurd! The verses seemed to me merely a pretty piece of sentiment——"

"They are the cry of a broken life; and what can be more tragic than that?" she retorted (and still she would not look at the small boat crawling along by the shore). "You can't multiply tragedy: it is an individual thing. People talk of the tragedy of ten thousand men stretched dead on a battle-field: the tragedy lies with each man by himself, and with his family—perhaps his sweetheart. You can't multiply tragedy. I say this piece of verse has the real personal cry in it, and it may be as true of one as of twenty thousand——"

"Eelin, you are talking for the mere sake of talking!" the mother remonstrated. "Cannot you tell me whether that is Somerled Macdonald out in the boat—you have younger eyes than mine."

"Ah, but you have always been unfair to Archie Gilchrist, Mummie—although perhaps unconsciously," the girl went on. "You would never believe in the future that lies before him. But I do. It isn't a town like Invernish nor a provincial editorship that is going to clip his wings. He sees wide. He has the large style—of course I don't mean in a careless trifle of this kind. And oh! I wish he was here!—I wish we had asked him to come along with us!——"

Down in the hollow lay the little hamlet—the inn, with its dependencies, one or two keeper's cottages, further along the miniature Free Kirk and the adjacent manse. As the waggonette slewed round the corner, by the triangular patch of trees enclosed by a stone wall, Wild Eelin had perforce to cease her feverish and inconsequent chatter; for here, in front of the inn, and seated and muffled up in an armchair, was old Mr. Macdonald, looking frightfully ill, and by his side was his son, who, when these ladies drove up, took off his cap, and remained bareheaded until they should alight.

CHAPTER XLII.

'BY MUDAL WATER.'

THE elder Macdonald was dreadfully agitated.

"What?" he said in an eager whisper to his son. "Her ladyship? And Miss Eelin too? Somerled, man, Somerled—help me up!—do you think I can receive them in this fashion?"

But a gentle hand was put on his arm, and the sweetest-voiced woman in Scotland said to him—

"Indeed, you shall not stir. We are not going to put you about in any way, or else we should not have come. We only wanted to see how you were; and I am glad to find you can get out into the fresh air——"

"Ah, but, Madam, you do not understand what an honour your visit is," he said to her in a struggling kind of way. "I dared hardly expect it. But I know who will understand—and that is the Ontario Macdonalds when they hear the news. I dared hardly expect it—or I would have made some preparations for your comfort. It is a remote little inn; but Somerled and I will do our best to entertain you; and I hope you will forgive whatever is amiss. It is an out-of-the-way little inn—and we did not expect you—well, perhaps that is wrong to say—for I hoped—yes, I hoped——"

Now Wild Eelin was in some respects a wise kind of young creature; and when she perceived this agitation on the part of the invalid—and that he seemed scarcely to know what he was saying—she made no scruple about breaking in.

"Oh, but, look here, Mr. Macdonald, we are only two idle women wandering about the country; and we are accustomed to fend for ourselves; and at the present moment we are

horribly in want of tea and bread-and-butter; and these we can get in the inn—and then we will come out and talk to you again. Now rest quiet, and in a few minutes we will come out and talk to you again——"

"Yes, but there must be preparations made for your comfort," he said, querulously. "Somerled—where are you—Somerled!" He tried to call, but was unable.

"Now don't make me angry, Mr. Macdonald," said Miss Eelin, with some tone of authority. "If we had thought we were going to be of the slightest trouble we should not have come near the place."

At this moment Somerled Macdonald returned, and informed the two ladies that rooms would be ready for them directly, and that tea was now being placed for them in the parlour. And so they proceeded to go indoors. As Eelin passed Somerled Macdonald, she had no word of thanks for him, not even a look, while his eyes were submissively lowered. It is true that when she stepped down from the waggonette she had directed a swift, scrutinising glance towards him, and he had answered that in a curiously perplexed and bewildered and timid manner, and she thought that he was paler than his wont. But afterwards she took no notice of him. And now she took no notice of him, as her mother and she went into the inn.

And then when they came out again she devoted herself exclusively to the old man, trying to soothe him into quietude with her blithe rambling talk.

"Why, Mr. Macdonald," she said, "this is a quite heavenly place for a convalescent. From whichever way the wind blows, it must come to you over leagues and leagues of moorland; and yet here in this corner you are snugly sheltered; even Ben Clebrig up there, that is a terrible brewer of storms, couldn't do anything to harm you. This part of the inn used to be a shooting-lodge in former days; I suppose either the Duke of Sutherland or Lord Reay had it. Lord Reay is the chief of the clan Mackay, of course you know. Did you hear of the reception given to Sir Fitzroy Maclean of Duart and to Maclean of Carsaig when they were out in America?—Macleans from all parts of Canada and the United States flocked to the standard of the chief——"

"And why not?—why not?" said old Allan Macdonald,

beginning again to breathe a little more excitedly. She noticed that in a moment, and was off on another tack.

"Oh, those shepherd-lads about here play a most iniquitous game," she went on, gaily. "You see, all the country in this neighbourhood isn't forest; parts of it are under sheep; and so those mischievous lads sometimes get pretty close to where the deer are. And can you guess what they do? They get the forked branch of a bush—a withered one for choice—and they whittle it away until it resembles the antlers of a stag; and then they go out into the open, and stick this in the heather just on the other side of the slope. Any one would swear it was a deer feeding, its head down, and its body invisible by reason of the slope; and suppose in the evening there was some sportsman returning to the inn and passing that way, why it's enough to make the poor man's heart jump out of his body. For here as he imagines is a stag close by him; and yet he cannot get at it by any possible stalk; and if he whistled it up, it would be off and away on the other side. That's a pretty trick to play on any innocent person, isn't it?—with a bit of dry wood!—"

"And have you handled the rifle yourself, Miss Eelin?" he asked of her.

"Oh, no!" she cried. "No, no, no! The curse that was laid on the serpent doesn't include me. I have seen the stalkers come home: I know what it is."

"But you throw a line?"

"Occasionally," she said, in an offhand way. "Sometimes—when Lily Neile is lazy. What I like better is to sit in the boat, with a book on my knee; and then when anything exciting occurs I am the gallery. Oh, there's plenty of amusement about. Now and again Dr. Gillespie takes me out with him to the Nairn links, and we have a round or two. It's capital fun to smash a club—when the head flies into the air, and the string unrolls itself in curls: it's like trying to harpoon a whale. Then there are other links. There's one that the cows come straying on to; and I've seen a cow swallow a golf-ball. It was my ball, to tell you the truth, and after a long drive, so that I felt deeply injured—"

"And so did the cow, doubtless," observed her mother.

"Oh, dear, no," was the careless reply. "All the thirty-nine, or fifty-nine, stomachs of that cow couldn't retain the

golf-ball. But I thought of writing to the Editor of the *Field*, asking him in the case of a cow swallowing a ball, what kind of a bunker it ought to be considered, and what was the proper method of procedure—" And so she chattered on, not without aim, and not without success.

Then he said to her—

"Miss Eelin, would you be so very kind as to draw your chair a little nearer, and let me touch your hand for a moment?"

Of course she did so, and he held her hand for a second, and patted it.

"Forgive me for asking you," he proceeded, "but is your hand larger or smaller than her ladyship's? You see, I should like to be able to distinguish between the two, just as I can between the two voices. Ay, the two voices—the two voices," he repeated; "and if the gate of death were wide open for me to-morrow, it is those two voices I should be wishing to hear—at the last—at the last—"

"Oh, about my hands?" the younger lady said, interrupting him without hesitation. "My hands are ever so much bigger and coarser than my mother's—"

"Eelin!"

"Ah, but they are," she continued, taking no heed of her mother's remonstrance. "You see, Mr. Macdonald, I have been brought up, or I have brought up myself, as a tomboy, with rowing, and swinging, and Indian clubs, and such things; while my dear mamma has always kept herself quite the lady, and is particular about the shape of her nails as she is about her Gaelic inflections. I think an inscrutable Providence designed my clumsy hands for dumb-bells and cricket-bats and things of that sort; and they answer pretty well, you know; I'm not such a horrible duffer, you know; not such an awful duffer; and when I've swum from the Devil's Kirn to the weir at the Islands, then I'll send you a sixpenny telegram to give you the news."

He let her talk on: the sound of her voice was like wine to him. And then he called out,

"Somerled! Are you there, Somerled?"

But Somerled was not there. Somerled was in earnest confabulation with Mrs. Mackay, the landlady (who, on hearing who her visitors were, had immediately ran off to change her gown), and he was imploring her to do this, that,

and the other, so that there might be special features at dinner. Were not the neighbouring keepers to be bribed, no matter at what cost? Or could she not have the dog-cart out and send a messenger to Mr. Strang, the factor at Balnavrain, begging for his friendly intervention? Or, perhaps, even, Mrs. Strang could be induced to lend a few custards and jellies and sweetmeats, which could afterwards be repaid to her in kind?

"But, Mr. Macdonald," the landlady said, with some spirit, "we can do such things ourselfs. Hef you been finding any fault?"

"Oh, no, no, far from it," he answered, anxiously. "Perhaps I have not been noticing—that is all. And I wanted something special for these ladies; but, you see, it is impossible to telegraph. Only," he added as a desperate afterthought, "you will make sure that Caitriana has a clean apron on when she waits at table."

"Now, Mr. Macdonald," protested the landlady, in the most good-humoured way, "did you ever see Caitriana go into the parlour with anything but a clean apron?"

"Oh, no, no, of course not!" he said. "Caitriana is an angel of delight, and is always as neat and trim as a fiddle, and looks after us wonderfully. I was only thinking what could be done. For my father and myself it does not matter; but entertaining strangers——"

"And do you have the opinion that the ladies of Kinvaig are strangers to Alt-na-Traive?" Mrs. Mackay again said, with a mild amazement. "When it was I myself that was giving Miss Eelin her first lessons in the Gaelic, the summers she was spending up at the lodge."

"You'll do your best, then, won't you!" he pleaded finally. "And don't spare any expense or trouble; for we must be their hosts here; they were very kind to us when we were in Invernish. And as for flowers, that is not to be thought of, I'm afraid; but have plenty of heather on the table, and the Macdonalds of Kinvaig will not miss the flowers."

It was Angus the water-bailiff who summoned young Macdonald to his father.

"Somerled," the sick man said, in a kind of undertone, "I fear there is no harp, or piano, or any such thing, in this place? For I would have liked to hear Miss Eelin

sing—just once more—before I set out on the long journey—— "

Miss Eelin had heard every word ; and she was not going to allow any talk of this kind.

" Oh, would you like me to sing something to you, Mr. Macdonald ?—for I don't need any piano or harp. Out here in the open is the best place for a Highland song, and the sigh of the hills is the proper accompaniment. And what, now, were you thinking of that I should sing to you ? "

"What you please, what you please, my dear young lady, if you will be so kind to an old man, who may never hear you again."

Well, the wise lass did not choose a pathetic song ; she did not choose the 'Fhear a Bhata,' that simply rends the hearts of these people in the Western Highlands : she chose a cheerful and contented song, the well known Clachan Ghlinn-da-ruail. A quite contented song, for the hero of it says—

'Although King George would grant to me
The highest rank and station,
I would prefer in Coire-Chathaidh
The shepherd's pay and ration.'

And yet, when Eelin Macdonald, turning her face a little away from them, and looking out on the loch, began to sing in the most simple and natural fashion—

'I met her on a Sabbath day,
Mild, young, and unassuming ;
Her voice is like the tuneful thrush,
Her cheeks are roses blooming—'

it was clear to Mrs. Macdonald that the invalid could not bear this ordeal. It was not the song ; the song was nothing ; it was the clear, vibrating, penetrating tones of the girl's voice that shook him to the soul ; and so great was his emotion—for he was all nerveless and undone after the illness he had passed through—that the mother placed a warning finger on her daughter's arm. Eelin turned, and her singing instantly ceased.

" There are a lot of other verses," said she, in the most unconcerned way, " and I need not bother you— "

He had put his handkerchief up to his face, to conceal the violence of his sobbing : her speaking voice was like wine

to him, and soothed him, but her singing voice—the soft, silver singing of this young girl's voice—wrought destruction within him.

"Oh, yes, a lot of verses," she continued, in the most indifferent manner, and she spoke as if she were really talking out to the wide loch and the hills. "They were written by Angus Fletcher, of Dunoon. Dunoon—that is on the Clyde, you know, Mr. Macdonald—and a very beautiful place, too: all those places on the Clyde are beautiful, with the mountains behind them, and the splendid opening out to sea. The heroine, she was called Shena Dhonn Coire-Chathaidh, and she afterwards became a Mrs. Black, and lived to a great age. Her grandfather, her father, and herself had in succession the farm of Coire-Chathaidh. I suppose Shena Dhonn was a great beauty: I wonder if she knew she was to become famous in Highland song. And sometimes I wonder if that other Mrs. Black, who was Byron's 'Maid of Athens,' could have foreseen the place she was to take in English literature. It might have consoled her a little bit, for she died in poor circumstances. And I wonder if any of those Highland girls suspected that their praises would be sung long after they were dead. Eilidh Bhàn, Mairi Lagach, Mo nighean donn bhoidheach, and the rest of them: I suppose they did not know; most likely they were daughters of well-to-do farmers; and the poet was a mere shepherd-lad or a fisher-lad, who durst not look so high; and he went away, of course; and the young lady of the farm married and forgot him, and spent the rest of her life in looking after her children. Mr. Macdonald, shouldn't there be a national fund for subsidising indigent lovers? We spend heaps of money in providing for other imbeciles: why not for these poor dears?"

And so she blethered on, this wise lass, until she had got him into a right cheerful mood again; and there was no more singing of Highland songs; no more of Shena Dhonn or Ailie Ban; she soon had him laughing over her idle stories and her silly reminiscences; until, indeed, there came out again from the inn Somerled Macdonald—Somerled, with the grave, obedient, earnest eyes.

She might have had a word for him, but she had not; while he on his part, when he had to address her, did so in a respectful and distant fashion, as if they were strangers.

She was giving herself entirely to the old man; and she had got into a merry and reckless mood; she was telling him the most horrible lies about her own juvenile experiences in these very wilds. And then her busy brain was full of ridiculous projects and schemes—not merely for the subsidising of indigent lovers and other imbeciles: she wanted, for example, a monument raised to the unknown epigrammatists who had enriched the world with their anonymous phrases.

"Why not?" said she. "Don't they deserve it? We allow a self-advertising Yankee to disfigure an old-fashioned English town like Stratford-on-Avon by putting up a preposterous drinking-fountain in his own honour; and yet we haven't the simplest tablet recording our gratitude to those benefactors of the human race. Could we exist now without such sayings as 'That depends on the liver,' 'Getting no forrarder,' and the immortal 'Don't!' And yet there is no monument! Why is there no monument? These are the people who make life happier by simply a chance phrase or a word; the people in Parliament jabber for hours, and the chief good they do is to make you profoundly grateful you are not compelled to read their jabberwocking. Oh, by the way, I would have one side of the monument devoted to authors who are well-known—like Mr. Lewis Carroll. Why, he has increased the English language! How could we live without 'The Walrus and the Carpenter'?——"

And so she jabberwocked, did this sagacious young lass; and sometimes she would prop up the cushion behind his head; and sometimes she would touch his hand with her fingers; and sometimes she would tell him what was happening around them—in the air—on the loch—up by the steep slopes and corries of Ben Clebrig. The mother looked on, smiling. She knew the wiles of this creature. She also had been a victim.

Then there was a rattle of wheels on the road; it was the doctor going his rounds (of five-and-twenty miles diameter); and as there was a chill breath beginning to draw up from the loch, he advised them to have the invalid conveyed indoors. And when that had been done, when Somerled Macdonald re-appeared, there was no longer an engrossing centre of interest: he himself had to set to work to entertain those ladies, who were in a manner his guests.

"I hope," said he, rather shyly, to the younger of the two, "that Mr. Gilchrist finds his new occupation agreeable."

"Oh, yes," said she. "The very thing he could most have desired."

"And of course his position in Invernish will be rather a better one?" he ventured to ask again.

"Oh, yes," said she. "Not that Invernish is the boundary of his aspirations."

"Ah, I understand," he said. "The literary gift is an extraordinary thing. A man speaks with one voice, but millions upon millions listen to him. And then the friends he makes, everywhere. And the social passport, if he cares for that. It is better than being crowned. I suppose that an author who is widely read and admired knows within himself that he could sail into Hobart Town, or land in Chicago railway station, or steam up the Gulf of California, with the certainty of finding a hearty and generous welcome wherever he went. It is a wonderful gift. The owner of it is to be envied," he added, in rather an absent kind of way.

"It has its responsibilities," the Bean-an-Tighearn remarked.

"Yes, yes," he said, with conviction. "A man ought to keep his pen clean, as he would keep himself clean. Anything else is prostitution of the basest."

"I think I can answer for Archie Gilchrist," said Eelin, quietly, "if ever he should be fortunate enough to address so wide an audience."

The doctor now made his appearance; he was a youngish man, keen of eye, alert, and with features that showed he was inured to travel.

"I hope our coming here," said the gentle-voiced lady, "has not caused your patient fatigue."

"Oh, not the least—not the least!" said he. "Happiness makes for cure. I believe in that—more than in medicines. Happiness makes for cure. And you have made him very proud and happy; he can talk of nothing else but your visit; you have done him more good than I could do. Only," he added, glancing at Somerled Macdonald, "I think it might be prudent if he were to rest for the remainder of the evening. If you ladies wouldn't mind dining by yourselves in the ordinary parlour."

"Certainly not, Doctor! Oh, by all means!" Mrs.

Macdonald exclaimed. "And perhaps, if you are staying over the night, you would be so kind as to join us?"

"Many, many thanks," said the young medico, "but I'm off for Tongue now—and it's a long drive." He looked at Eelin Macdonald as he shook hands with her in saying good-bye; and she looked at him again, in her fearless fashion—with the eyes like the blue of the sea-wave: he would have something to recall and to think over, during the monotonous and lonely miles that lie between Alt-na-Traive and Tongue.

But they were to have another glimpse of old Allan Macdonald that night; for between eight and nine someone tapped at their parlour door, and was bidden to enter. It was Somerled Macdonald, and he was the bearer of a message, and yet why should he have been so diffident about it, and why the need of any preamble? His father, he said, was back in his own land, after many years; and he had been thinking of his young days; and—and, in short, would the two ladies come in to family worship?

"Oh, most willingly—most willingly," said the sweet-voiced Bean-an-Tighearn, rising at once. "Will you show us the way to your sitting-room?"

And so they followed him along the narrow passage, and here was old Allan Macdonald with his easy-chair drawn to the head of the table; and here was the tall and fair-haired servant lass Caitriana, whom most people called Kate; and here was Angus that used to be water-bailiff on the Garva. Even with the newcomers, it was a small congregation, in this remote little hamlet buried amidst the great and silent and solitary hills: indeed there was something strange about the whole proceeding—in this lamp-lit room, with the consciousness of the vast surrounding darkness outside. The service was simple and brief enough. Mr. Macdonald began by repeating—with hardly a check or alteration of a word, so practised was his memory—a portion of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew—'At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And then when he had finished the passage, he said "Let us now praise God by singing the CXXI. Psalm." It was a remarkable selection for a blind man to make—'I to the hills will lift mine eyes'—; but doubtless it was with other than physical eyes that he saw Ben Clebrig, and Ben

Loyal, and the rest of them, now wrapped in the silence and solemnity of the night. But what startled one of the visitors was that the younger Macdonald led the singing—in a strong and sensitive baritone voice that had, of course, to be modulated to the limited space; and her own voice was feeble in joining in, because of her sense of wonder; she was listening all the time—and perhaps trembling a little. It was to the proudly pathetic tune of *Coleshill* that they sang:

'I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid.
My safety cometh from the Lord,
Who heav'n and earth hath made.
Thy foot He'll not let slide, nor will
He slumber that thee keeps.
Behold, He that keeps Israel,
He slumbers not, nor sleeps.'

They had no organ, nor any trained band of choristers, nor the pageantry of viol and drum; but the simple little service was effective enough—in this small, isolated, yellow-lit chamber set amongst the encompassing majesty of the mountains and the darkness and the stars. And then with mutual good wishes they parted and went their several ways. But Eelin Macdonald had got something added to remember, when she was by herself, in the solitude of the midnight hours.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TOWN AND RIVER.

In a dingily-furnished apartment in a back lane in Invernish, a girl sate sewing, by the aid of a small paraffin lamp. She was not exactly plain, and she was not exactly pretty, but she had honest brown eyes and a pleasant expression of face. To her entered—without any ceremony of rapping or ringing—a grand young lady: a young lady of tall and elegant figure, and curly canary-coloured hair, and clever grey eyes; smartly dressed, too—satin shoes, black silk skirt, green cloth jacket trimmed with fur, fur also round her neck, kid gloves and lace cuffs, while the crowning of the edifice was a white straw hat with scarlet artificial poppies all complete. A gorgeous apparition to open the door of the poor sempstress's room; and this was her manner of speech, when she had taken the sole remaining chair.

"Jane Forsyth," said she, in tones of high indignation, "it just makes me sick to see you slavin and slavin here, night after night. When that animal Struthers chucked you, why didn't you sue him for a month's salary, and look about for another place? You'll never get another place, hidin in this hole, and slavin for the sweaters. One thing: the new-laid eggs and odds and ends your people send you from the country—I hope you're not such a fool as to pass them on to that young Gilchrist, now he's become a toff. I never heard of such a thing—a girl starving herself to feed a man, and not even telling him!"

"It was through me he lost his situation—"

"And now you've lost yours through him," was the instant rejoinder. "Oh, I know. I can see into a bally milestone as well as anybody; and after that affair Struthers

took his first chance and hoisted you out. I'd have slapped his jaw, I would, and winked my eye at the bloomin beak. Well, I hope there's to be no more secret passing-on of new-laid eggs and chickens. Oh, what a silly you are! I tell you, men are beasts. You trust me. I've seen enough of 'em. This child has had the scales taken off her eyes. You don't know. You've met only one here or one there. I've seen 'em in crowds, rushin' in and rushin' out. I haven't been for five years at Crewe Junction without picking up a notion or two. And I tell you, men are beasts. They'd give their mortal souls for a drink. They'd sacrifice their return tickets, and let their wife and children howl and cry around the station, anything for a drink: blimey if they often can't wait for the soda! One time it's gin, another time it's rum, in this town it's special Scotch —anything will do for a gargle; and a fellow would leave his sweetheart on his wedding-day if anybody offered him a glass of fizz. I've had experience. I know what they are. And I know what they think they are—a slashin' lot of 'eroes: that's when they get on the booze and the bounce; and they'll lie and they'll lie fit to bust themselves; and it's poor women that's supposed to take in all their clack. M'yes! Perhaps. There's one young lady from the country who doesn't tumble to that clabber any more. I've heard too much of it. Oh, my gracious, they sometimes try to be funny!—and the old, old chestnuts they trot out!—for of course a barmaid is not supposed to have any brains; and the more maudlin the man becomes the more humorous he tries to be. It's a mercy the pig has to light his pipe sometimes, and that gives one a rest." She unpinned her hat, and pitched the flaming ornament on to the bed. "Here, give me that bally thing, and I'll have a shy at it: I tell you, you're wearing your eyes out!"

And she would have snatched the work away, only that Miss Forsyth refused.

"Much you know, Clara," she said, with a quiet giggle, "about hem-stitching and faggoting!"

"Oh, very well," said the other, carelessly, "burn your eyes out if you choose! But that wasn't what I came here about to-night. And I wouldn't tell you until I had made plain what my opinion of men amounted to. No: the girl who allows herself to think well of those creatures is a

horrible ass. Simply a horrible ass. I say it, because I know it. If you had been at Crewe Junction for five years, you wouldn't be the noodle you are. However, that's not my affair. I'm not your Creator: if I had been, I'd have made you up with more pluck than to send new-laid eggs anonymous-like, to any young man——"

"It was wicked of that old Mrs. Christie to tell you——"

"Oh, bless your simple heart, what is it that I don't hear!" exclaimed the resplendent damsel, from out of her surrounding of strong scent. "I am the general fountain of intelligence: that's the kind of person I am! But now to business. I've warned you as to what men are: and yet, if you have any fancy for that sneaking fellow Gilchrist—oh, my goodie, he's an Editor—we'll have to call him Mr. now—well, you'd better look out, my dear innocent dove, for they're going to do him a mischief. Yes, they are. To-morrow morning, first thing. They've found out all about his ways——"

"But who, Clara, but who?" cried the frightened and bewildered little sempstress.

"Why, the bruisers up from Glengarva!—them that was livin' at Bridge of Kinvaig. They're the curse of the town! They were in at the bar to-night—blind. I wouldn't serve them: not me: no, I wouldn't: but they were so blind full that they kept on jawing and jawing; and I can tell you this little pitcher has long ears, though it didn't concern me much. To-morrow morning—out by the Islands—that's the kind of idea they have; only the blind-drunk idiots may sleep it all off—how can I tell? What I know is that they mean to do the young man a mischief; and they've learned up all about his ways; and most likely to-morrow morning it will be; and if some one doesn't give him a tip, he'll be reduced to a pulpy mass. Twig? Oh, you needn't look so scared. I'd go and warn him myself; but at this time o' night, it wouldn't look quite respectable, would it? Well, I've done my duty," continued the clever-eyed maiden, as she took up her hat and pinned it on again. "Mind, I wouldn't interest myself much in any man, if I was you. It doesn't pay. If they interest themselves in you, yes, I'll allow that's better business. Good-night, Janey: you've hard lines of it with that

—what do you call it—faggoting? but you aint got to get up at such a bally hour in the morning as I have."

And so the exuberant damsel, with her kid gloves, and her scarlet poppies, and her fierce atmosphere of perfume, took her departure, leaving poor little Janet Forsyth in a sad state of alarm. For she also had heard something of this gang of prizefighters—indeed they had become notorious in the town; and she knew quite well what were Archie Gilchrist's habits, and upon her it now devolved to give him warning. So at once she went to bed, hoping to wake early enough to go out to the Islands. But she could not sleep. Hour after hour passed, in a torture of apprehension; she tried to get rest, for she wanted to be along by the river at daybreak; yet no rest came to her, as the nearest church from time to time sent its funereal note into the night. And then, just as she ought to have been getting up, exhausted nature claimed its due, and she sank into slumber tost about by dreams and terrors.

And meanwhile the dawn was declaring itself over the Islands, in the mysterious silence that prevails before the awakening of human life. There was a faint, indescribable odour of autumn in the still air; there was an autumn haze hovering about the woods; there was an autumn sprinkling of yellow and crimson in the foliage—when one had found sufficient daylight to see. And yet the ineffable procession from grey to lilac, and from opalescent lilac to rose, and from wild flaming rose to a wonder of gold, was a gradual and almost unnoticeable thing: a young man seated out here—on the bench carved with the initials of many bygone lovers—facing the multitudinous glint of the silver-racing stream—and busy with his books, might be pardoned for not observing the still progress of the hours. All the world around him appeared to be asleep. The green Venetian blinds of Glengarva House—far over there beyond the chasing current—were down. Fergus had not yet begun his thrashing of the pools. Nay, if Little Isabel of the Bannocks had uttered her plaintive call from the neighbouring heights, should he not have heard, in despite of the incessant hushed clamour of the weir?

It was not Little Isabel of the Bannocks who disturbed Archie Gilchrist's studies. Absorbed as he was in these books and pamphlets—they had mostly reference to the

volume on Hector Macneill and Tannahill that he and Eelin Macdonald proposed to publish in collaboration—absorbed as he was, he heard heavy steps behind him. And then his privacy was invaded; several men—at whom he hardly glanced—taking their places on this wooden bench. But that was right enough. The Islands are free to the public. If a student chooses to make them a place for work or for wistful meditation, he must run the risk of being intruded upon. And so familiar was Archie Gilchrist with these obvious conditions that, when the strangers appeared he bundled up the papers that had been lying beside him, and stuffed them into his pocket, so that no one should be incommoded.

Matters, however, soon assumed a different aspect. He had simply ignored the presence of the newcomers—being, as it chanced, entirely engaged with 'The Links of Forth, or a Parting Peep at the Carse of Stirling'; but they seemed determined to thrust themselves on his attention. They crowded him up to the end of the bench; and he made way for them, inch by inch, until their purpose of insult could be no longer mistaken. Then he turned. He saw who the brutes were; he knew who they were; they had established a reputation for themselves in and around Invernish. And by this time Archie Gilchrist's blood was all aflame. If he were to be crowded one other inch along the seat, the nearest of the bullet-headed ruffians would find a thunderbolt between his eyes.

"Look here, young man, are ye fond o' swimmin?" said the one who had crushed up most closely.

The taunting tone was unmistakable.

"Mind your own business!" said Gilchrist, and he got his left fist clenched.

The fool took no heed.

"Oh, my, aint 'e 'aughty!" he exclaimed, derisively. "A gent as is a gent, and no error! He wants the 'ole of the bench, does 'e, all to hisself? Well, I never eerd of sich cheek! I never did, all my bloomin days. The 'ole of the bench he wants, my eyes! I'm fair ashamed. Fair ashamed! Them's manners! The 'ole of the bloomin bench——" And then the silly idiot was so imprudent as to try to jog Gilchrist off the bench altogether. It was far from prudent. It was quite the reverse of prudent. For

the next moment he had got Gilchrist's fist planted clean and square into the midst of his ugly physiognomy, and he went sprawling into the stones. Unfortunately, he was only one of several. Archie Gilchrist sprang up; but he was immediately surrounded. Before he knew what was happening, his arms had been pinioned and roped behind him; and he found himself being hustled and jostled over the gravel, and through the grass, and down by the bushes, until he was flung headlong into the river.

The strange thing was that the last object he saw before the waters crashed over his face was Glengarva House—away on the other side of the stream. So still and peaceful it appeared: the sun beginning to tell on the red sandstone and the green blinds—the trees on the terrace hardly moving in the morning air. It was a sort of farewell glimpse—of astonishing vividness; it seemed to him as if he were saying good-bye; for the rushing current was lapping and battering all about his head, and his hands were tied behind him, and he was being swept along to the Devil's Kirn.

But natural instinct asserted itself: there was no sentimental thought of Glengarva House and its green blinds when he found that he could shoot out his legs; and he was an excellent swimmer; when he had knocked the foam from his eyes, and got a gasping breath of air, he did not even fear the Devil's Kirn. At least he had no time for fear, or for thinking about fear; because the heavy current hurled him along, and all he craved for was another mouthful of air—only another mouthful, and he thought he might find safety somewhere, bound as he was. He was being thrown about like a drowned cat. And yet he fought and fought; and blew the water out of his mouth; and hoped for mercy: and had some vague remembrance of the deep black eddy where the Devil's Kirn curls under the hazel and alder and rowan bushes. And then again he did not care. It seemed hardly worth the struggling for. And there, facing the clear-lit dawn (his splashed eyes could not see, but well he knew where the red house was, and the ivy, and the black araucaria, and the garden-plots aglow and fragrant) there was one who might be rather glad of this release. No, he did not care (this was when the water was choking him, and he felt deadly faint). He only wanted to

say good-bye. The red house and the glistening ivy and the shimmering trees on the terrace were all invisible to him; and yet he thought of saying good-bye. O Heavens, if the green Venetian blind were to be drawn up—if a face and eyes and hair too wonderful for aught but distant worship were to appear there—if for one last moment he might have a glimpse of all he had hoped for on earth—this stupefaction that was overpowering him would have been more endurable—would almost have been joyous in a wild kind of way.

And then the hurling swirl of the Devil's Kirn took him and swept him in to the black back-water; and yet again, exhausted as he was, he instinctively strove for his life; and when he found that a rowan branch was just over his head—trailing in the stream indeed—he seized the lowest leaves with his teeth, and held. Another kick or two, and he got a firmer grip, and held, and held, and now he was recovering his breath somewhat. But it did not seem to him that this clinging on to existence was of any more use. Why not let things go? No one would miss him. There was the old woman up at Dingwall; but she also was about ready to depart; and they might meet elsewhere. And then he lost consciousness.

When he partially came to himself he was lying on the bank, close by the bushes, and there was a young girl stooping over him, and tending him, and weeping bitterly. But her tears were not as bitter as her self-reproach.

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist," she was saying, as she pressed back the wet hair from his forehead, and with rubbing sought to restore some life to the icy hands, "it was all my fault. Can you hear me? It was all my fault. I was told they were going to do you harm. And I overslept. And I came running all the way, first to your house, and then out here. Oh, Mr. Gilchrist, will you ever forgive me? And what am I to do now? Maybe I should go into the town for a cab—oh, I can run—I am not a bit breathless or tired—oh, yes, I can run——"

But here her sobbing overtook her again, and she could do nothing but persistently chafe the cold hands.

And then when he had pulled himself together a bit further, and saw who this was who was bending over him, he said in a sudden terror—

"Oh, Miss Forsyth, I'm late with the keys!"

And still she tried to reanimate the poor limp hands; and she was saying to him—

"Oh, never mind the keys! You forget. You're not in Struthers's shop now. You've got nothing to do with keys."

His senses were returning.

"Who pulled me out?" he said.

"I did," she answered him—perhaps with some faint glimmer of triumph after all.

"And the cords—who cut them?"

"Well, I did," the intrepid little sempstress said: he could not see her small housewife-case, with its scissors and such things, lying on the grass close by.

Then, when life came well back to him, he exclaimed in astonishment—

"But you are all wet! Oh, I understand—hauling me out! Ah, well, you might have let me go. But that's nothing. Will you hide yourself in the bushes, and I will run in to the town for a cab?"

"But it's you—it's you that I'm thinking of," she said, making a brave effort to subdue her sobbing. "For it was all my fault. Will you ever forgive me? I sate up the whole night through: and then to fall asleep just when I should have been here——"

"Oh, don't talk like that," he made answer to her as he struggled to his feet—she still tending him in a helpless, affectionate kind of way—trying to get the water out of his sodden clothes—binding her handkerchief round his neck—and so on; and again he pantingly said—

"No, don't talk like that! For you know you have saved my life—though whether it was worth the doing is another matter. And it's you that I am anxious about. You must keep walking. Come away—unless you're afraid to face the people of Invernish with such a drowned scarecrow as I am."

"Much I care for the people of Invernish!" said she. "And it's you that must keep walking."

And so they set out; and perhaps she was a little proud of having saved him from destruction; for she was laughing and making merry over their sad plight; though, when a cab did present itself (the driver had taken General Mallock out to the Laggan stretch of the Nish, and was

now returning along the Dores road) she was glad enough to accept its shelter; and in this fashion the bedraggled pair were taken to their respective homes.

When the old woman who looked after Archie Gilchrist's straw-thatched cottage—for he had not had time as yet to look for another house—when she opened the door, she gaped and stared at him as if he had been a warlock. He passed by her astonishment.

"See here, Mrs. Christie," he said, "you must go along at once to Struthers's shop in Union-street, and get the address of Miss Forsyth who is employed there, and you must seek her out at her lodgings, and do everything you can for her. Port-wine negus and bed and blankets—that's about the programme. Do everything for her you can think of—"

"But what has happened, sir?" the old woman said, with eyes staring at the wet clothes. "Miss Forsyth was here this mornin, rinnin like a hare, askin for ye, sir, ay, and greetin and greetin; and off she set again, like one demented, when I tellt her ye had gaen up the watter. And is it possible ye dinna ken that the young lass has left Struthers's shop—ay, ay, she was pitten oot, from a' that I can hear; and is it possible ye never jaloused wha it was that left the new-laid eggs for ye, or the aipples for cookin, or the bit rabbit or chicken nows and again? And I've held my tongue long enough. It's jist peetiful to see such kindness—and no notice taken—"

"Do you mean to say it was Miss Forsyth who was leaving these secret little presents?" he demanded.

"Ay, and who else?" she retorted sturdily. "And I promised not to tell. But if there's any harm come to her—"

"No, no, no, there is none," said he, hastily. "But she hauled me out of the river, and of course she got wet, and I want you to go along and do everything you can for her. Everything! Get her to bed, first of all; and then port wine negus—perhaps with a little cinnamon in it—and hot, you know, hot; you can buy the bottle of port-wine in Church-street; and the best, you know, Mrs. Christie, the best—"

"But what about yourself, sir?" the elderly housekeeper protested.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, impatiently. "I will

change as soon as you've gone. But mind you do everything you can for Miss Forsyth; and when you come back, you might give me a hint as to her circumstances, if she has lost her situation. Quick, quick, now, Mrs. Christie! See that there's a fire in Miss Forsyth's room; and plenty of blankets on the bed; do everything you can think of—I lippen to you, you know—"

And so he despatched the old dame on her errand; and then, all dripping as he was, he sate down in the cane chair. There were many things to summon out of his memory—the hitherto unexplained presentation of cooking-apples, for example, and new-laid eggs, with an occasional fowl or rabbit; and all these pointing to stealthy and secret visits that had been so carefully hidden from him. Yes, and there was more than that he could recall: he could also recall the quiet modesty of a pair of timid brown eyes.

CHAPTER XLIV.

'THE WAY TO WOO.'

It was fortunate for Archie Gilchrist that his dip in the Devil's Kirn did him no appreciable harm, for it was on the evening of this same day he had promised to dine with the ladies of Glengarva House. He was to be the only guest; and on such informal occasions he was accustomed to go out at an early hour: there were literary matters to discuss and arrange with Miss Eelin; or the three of them would walk along the terrace fronting the river; sometimes, as the dusk fell, the spectral white boat would silently glide into the scene, with Lily Neile, the phantom lady, wielding her almost invisible salmon-rod, and calling back to them in a voice not usually possessed by phantoms. And sometimes Lily Neile, oft-protesting, could be induced to become a fourth at dinner—despite her fishing attire. What did they care about her fishing attire? She was a merry lass, and excellent company.

But on this particular afternoon it did not seem as if there were to be any strollings up and down the quiet tennis-lawn (with voices heard far across the stream) for throughout the day the heavens had been heavy and louring, with vaporous darkenings now and again, and even at times a menace of rain. As he passed by the Castle hill, and looked over to the row of tall elms, there was no animation in their foliage, nor yet in the purple skies visible through the branches; further along the curving stretch of water in which that morning he had fought for his life seemed remote and obscure: the pervading gloom appeared to say that the night was not far off. Nevertheless it is the unexpected that happens in these latitudes. He had just got across the smaller suspension-bridge when there was a wild

breaking up in the west; the sky overhead cleared as if by magic; and level golden beams shot across to warm into colour the wooded heights in the east. The golden radiance grew and grew, until there was a full flood of it—on the banked-up gardens, on the masses of oak and ash and rowan, and on one loftily-perched and gabled house, the shining windows of which sent down upon the now awakened river a blaze of reflections in brilliant saffron-white, among the soft, oily olive-greens. The world had undergone a sudden transfiguration. There was a laughter of children coming home from their blackberrying; no doubt they had been out all day among the russet and dark-green bushes, with the glossy fruit glistening luscious here and there, and here and there a dog-rose hip shining red at the apex of its leafless stem. And as the wonder and glory increased all around him, and as the strange light burned along those steep slopes on the other side of the stream, he began to think it possible that the ladies of Glengarva House might have been drawn forth from their occupations, to survey this suddenly resplendent picture. It is not every evening one finds a universe on fire—after a day of lead.

His conjecture was right: Eelin and her mother were out on the terrace, under the canopy of lime, and elm, and maple, and they were looking away to the other side, where the hanging foliage still caught the wild glare. And then, as they were regarding the river, it was but natural, when he joined them, that he should tell them of his adventure of the morning—nor making too much of it either. The two ladies received the news in a very different fashion. The gentle Bean-an-Tighearn was full of sympathy and also alarm; he must avoid going to these unfrequented neighbourhoods at such early hours; perhaps if some one—had been annoyed by something that had appeared in the Invernish *Observer*—perhaps a little inquiry—and representation—

Wild Eelin was of another mind.

"It is perfectly abominable," she said, in passionate indignation, "that such a thing should happen in a civilised country. Only it isn't a civilised country wherever Lord Mountmahon's gang are let loose. And it is Lord Mountmahon you must aim at, Archie; he set them on. I am convinced; I would rather let these crop-eared bull-dogs go

altogether than that he should escape. For of course there will be a prosecution?"

"Oh, most certainly," said he. "The cabman driving in along the Dores road met them running off, and can identify them. But that's not the question—I want to get at their employer——"

"Their employer is Lord Mountmahon!" she exclaimed again. "Everybody knows it. These poor wretches only work for his pay; they could have no possible grudge against you. Whereas, he might."

"Well, yes, he might," responded Gilchrist, with a bit of a laugh, "for I was nearly throwing him out of my office-room the other day. On the whole, there is something to be said for their side of the question, you know. They may contend that I began it; for before they tied my arms I hit one of them 'quite a hard knock' between the eyes: I'm afraid he won't see so well for some time to come. But there is no doubt the whole affair was preconcerted: I can show that: the broken-noses were bragging the night before, in a refreshment-room, of the exploit they had in hand; and I've got the cord I was bound with—it is brand new—"

"But Mountmahon—Mountmahon—how are you going to reach him?" said Eelin, with fierce vengeance in her tones.

"I'm afraid it won't be easy," said he, quite good-naturedly, "unless a five-pound note were to tempt one of the bullet-heads to blab—"

"Oh, Mr. Gilchrist," entreated the sweet-voiced, elderly lady, "have nothing more to do with them! Leave them alone! They will only do you more injury. You will never be able to prove that Lord Mountmahon instigated them; and, you see, they are many, and you are only one; do not mind what Eelin says—she is always so vindictive if a friend of hers is harmed in any way; you must not pay any heed to her—"

"I know what I should do if I were a man," said Eelin, turning proudly away.

"What, make for Mountmahon straight and without any form of law," said Gilchrist, laughing. "Well, it may come to that. Stranger things have happened."

By this time the gates of the golden west were slowly

closing; the window-panes of the gabled house on the heights had lost their fire; the river had sunk in tone, and a pale mist began to creep along the valley; the hanging woods were no longer of a burnished splendour, they had become dead, and cold, and distant; finally, through the almost invisible foliage, there shot a sudden ray of orange—the first of the lamps. And presently, behind them, a gong sounded: when they turned they found that the drawing-room was all aglow, and no doubt the dining-room was also lit up, though the blinds were down. And so they went indoors; they did not wait to see whether the Grey Lady was going to fish the ghostly shadows of the Devil's Kirn.

The poor, timid, sweet-voiced hostess had not too easy a time of it at this modest banquet. For the truth is, she never had acquired any great sympathy for rustic lovers, or, at least, for their appearances in print; and when Miss Eelin and her sworn champion were raving with enthusiasm about this piece or that piece—some pathetic wail at parting—some cry of despair in absence—some tender recollections of youthful days and scenes, with Jeanie, or Mary, or Phemie the queen and heroine of the never-to-be-forgotten dales and woods—she could only interfere with a quiet wonder, and now and again with a trifle of gentle sarcasm.

"Why should the young man," she asked, as she had asked on previous occasions, "make such a public protest of his determination to wed a particular young woman; and why, when she jilts him, or he has to go away, should he ask the public to bewail his bitter loss?"

"Why?" said Archie Gilchrist. "Because these are the tragedies of life; and of course they occur more frequently among people in straitened circumstances than among the wealthier classes, who can choose their mates at leisure—and perhaps with indifference. The heart of the peasant-poet burns hot, and he must tell his tale. He does not appeal to the wealthier classes. If they care to buy his book, or to regard him, for a brief while, as a social curiosity, well and good; but it is the sympathy of his fellows that he wants—he wants to hear one of his songs sung by a servant-lass as she is at work in the fields."

"Yes," said Miss Eelin, chiming in, "and surely these songs are more true to human nature—more true to life and

human experience than the theatrical bemoanments of Lord Byron or the love-twitterings of Tommy Moore?"

"Oh, very well," said the mother, smiling. "As long as your rustic sweethearts don't call themselves Chloe and Corydon I can bear with them."

And so they went on disputing, asserting, and contradicting—yet not with much ill-humour; and when Byron, or Moore, or anyone else got a chance slap it was with but a laughing sort of malice; there was no finality of judgment in these paradoxical flouts. And Hector Macneill was duly belauded—in a more sincere fashion; and Tannahill had his meed of pity; for these, after all, were the two subjects that more nearly concerned the budding authors.

Then they went into the drawing-room—with its long, rose-tinted curtains and its shaded lamps placed here and there; but when tea had been served the mother most considerately asked to be excused, saying that she had some letters to write; so that Archie Gilchrist and Eelin of the sea-blue eyes, and the bunched-up black hair, and the fearless demeanour, were left by themselves. She crossed over to the piano, and sate down, and he followed her, and stood by.

"What would you like me to play for you?" she asked—and her fingers, idling over the keys, wandered into Tschaikowsky's Chanson Triste. Well, he could not answer her. For though this music was a kind of music quite unfamiliar to him, he had enough of the artist-sense to feel it, and to feel it deeply. The divine melancholy of this strain—now hushed, and low, and penetrating, and now louder, and with an appeal that rent the heart—quite overcame him: in his bewilderment he tried to liken it to other things: it was the cry of some poor lost soul, in the night, on the seaboard, calling for comrades that answered not; it was the voice of some mystic invisible choir in the heavens interceding for compassion and pity on the sons of men. If life could be so attuned, would not existence become a prolonged rapture—and yet inexpressibly sad, and mournful, and unearthly? The voice of the invisible choir came from a great distance. The lost creature crept forlorn along lonely shores in the dark. And then, again, he thought he was listening to some proud salutation of adieu, as the crowds of hapless lovers, through all the centuries, passed, not

unwillingly, to their doom. Why, this was a pæan in praise of the belle dame sans merci. It was a joyous song of victory—though in some inexplicable heartrending fashion. The dead and dying made no protest; nay, they pledged her—those of them who could lift up a hand; they pledged her, even with their blanched faces and distraught eyes; and there was no thought of reproach. And as for the belle dame sans merci, why, she went singing on her way! Perhaps she could not hear those proud and faint farewells.

The sudden silence startled him back to his senses.

"It is very beautiful," he said. "Oh, yes, it is very beautiful—but—but it sounds so far away—yes—as far away—as you are from me, Eelin."

There was a sob in his voice. She looked up in surprise.

"I have something to say to you, Eelin," he went on, and instinctively she rose, and accompanied him to the small central table where there was a better light, and they took their places. She did not seem much alarmed: perhaps he had a new literary scheme to unfold. Tschaikowsky's Chanson Triste, exquisite as it is, could not have moved him to any sudden resolve.

"Eelin," said he, in a breathless kind of way, "the relations between you and me are very strange, and I sometimes think it is my fault. I have tried to imagine what you desired, and perhaps—well, perhaps I have been mistaken—and—and the result does not seem to me quite natural. Don't misunderstand me. I will be to you just whatever you wish; and I don't complain; only, I may have made a mistake. I may have gone too far in the other direction. Only—only—you must tell me; and I will be to you as you wish me to be; and never complain—oh, no, not that: why should I complain after having met with such undeserved great fortune?" And then again he said, following up these incoherent sentences: "Eelin, there was mention at dinner of Hector Macneill's 'The Way to Woo'—do you remember the last verse?"

Surely it was not the rose-tint of the curtains that was answerable for this quick suffusion of colour? Well she remembered the lines. They speak of a young lad who has come a long way to see a young lass, and who beseeches her to tell him how best to woo her; the conclusion of the matter being as follows:

'She hid her fair face in her true lover's bosom;
The saft tear of transport filled ilk lover's e'e;
The burnie ran sweet by their side as they sabbit,
And sweet sang the mavis abune on the tree.
He clasped her, he pressed her, he ca'd her his hinnie,
And aften he tasted her hinnie-sweet mou';
And aye, 'tween ilk kiss, she sighed to her Johnnie,
Oh laddie! oh laddie! weel weel can ye woo!'

Perfectly she remembered the lines; and she became a little apprehensive.

"You know, Eelin," said he, "we are supposed to be engaged lovers, and yet you have never granted me one kiss. Perhaps I have misunderstood you. Perhaps I have taken you too literally—"

"Oh, no—oh, no, indeed!" she answered him hastily. "Indeed no! You have been so considerate!—you have been so generous—and kind! Because—because—well, I may not be like other girls—and it may be quite unnatural—and quite blameable too—but I rather shrink from the caresses that one reads of in books. And you have been so considerate—oh, so very generous and considerate!—I have been so grateful to you! I had looked forward to a sort of literary copartnership—my helping you in my poor way—looking out for any references, or anything of that kind—"

"But, Eelin," he said, gravely, "our engagement, if it is to continue at all, must end in marriage; and marriage isn't made up of magazine-articles. And I have been thinking—you cannot tell with what bitterness I have been thinking!—that there is something wrong. You are as far away from me as that beautiful music you were playing. And why should I tie you down to an undertaking made in a moment of thoughtlessness—"

With that she got up from her chair, and stood facing him.

"Then you reject me," she said, in a low tone, and with her eyes cast down. "You reject me—"

He instantly rose and caught her hand.

"Don't talk like that, Eelin!" he implored of her. "I—reject you? It is madness to think of such a thing! But—but—if I were to release you?—"

"When I make a promise," said the girl, "it is my nature to keep it, and I wish for no release. But then—but then—if I am thought unworthy—"

"Eelin!" he exclaimed, and straightway he would have caught her to his arms and kissed and kissed her into a compliant mood, only that in some mysterious way she shrank from his embrace, and he understood, and mutely obeyed. "Let it be as you will, then," he said, despairingly. "I may have gone the wrong 'way to woo'—I may be more fortunate by-and-by."

"Oh, you have been so considerate!" she cried again. "How can I show my gratitude to you? But perhaps I may yet—perhaps I may yet—who knows?" And with that she took his hand and touched it with her lips; and that was the only suggestion of endearment that had so far taken place between these two lovers.

In due course he said good-bye, and set out on his homeward way. The river was dark, yet not quite so dark as the black suspension-bridge that spanned it. But O the wild white wonder of the starlit heavens—the distant and throbbing worlds to which mortals have given transitory names—Andromeda, with her shackles broken, and now serene and afar—Cassiopeia, with her trembling jewels that burned in the night: they were all so beautiful, but so sadly remote! Perhaps, in those unknown lands, the Chanson Triste would be part of the mystic language hovering in the air: here, in this common world, it seemed only to speak of heartbreaking and misery and farewell. He did not understand. He wished to do his best. But he was consumed by a great love; and those starlit heavens—why, he did not know—appeared to convince him of the hopelessness of it all.

CHAPTER XLV.

A MORNING PLUNGE.

Now while as yet the new day was hidden by the eastern hills, and all the world appeared to lie asleep, a black vehicle was quietly driven up to the front of General Mallock's railings, and almost simultaneously Wild Eelin and Morag the Mull lass issued from Glengarva House, shutting the door noiselessly behind them. And Eelin, in stealthy whispers, was trying to reassure her handmaiden.

"There is really no risk, Morag," she said in those hushed undertones. "And it is of great importance for every one to know what to do when flung into the sea. You might stumble off a paddle-box, you know, or a rowing-boat might be capsized; and you ought to be prepared. And there is no risk, Morag; for I am going to save your life; only, you must not grip me. You leave me alone, and I'll bring you out of the water all right. But don't grip me. Just imagine you are drowned, and quite helpless, and you'll see how I'll hoist you over the gunwale. I don't think you can possibly catch cold; for it will only be an affair of a few minutes; and in this bag there is everything that can be wanted for a change; and the cab will be waiting to bring us back to the house. You're not frightened, are you, Morag?"

"N—no, Miss," said the Mull lass, with her teeth chattering; the morning air was somewhat chill.

"Because you have courage to put aside all the havers that old Maxwell tells you, about Haggart the murderer and his breaking of jails; and I'm sure you'll be brave enough for this enterprise—when it will be of great practical service to every one concerned."

Morag said nothing: she was rather a timid lass; and she did not quite understand. But now they were arrived at the black vehicle, from the inside of which Lily Neile spoke blithely:

"How are you, old girl? All serene? Let Morag go on the box, and take your bag with her; for I've got one in here, and it's tol-lol biggish—just in case you may want to save me too—for who knows what accident may occur? —and a dry pair of Harris stockings makes all the difference betwixt a man and a mouse. Good morning, Morag!—heard anything of David Haggart's ghost whizzing about of late? Bundle up, now; and let's be off."

And so they drove away through the night—with here and there an orange gas-lamp piercing the darkness; and inside the cab Lily Neile and Eelin were singing to themselves, but in carefully diminished tones

'A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry,
For we are going to Altnaherry.'

They passed the lights of Invernish; all the town was dead in slumber; not a dog barked. They went down by Friars' Place and Capel Inch to Thornbush Quay, and still the refrain kept coming and going in fitful snatches—

'A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry,
For we are going to Altnaherry.'

But surely there was some indication of the new day? When they got along to the harbour, the masts of a schooner, lying listed over on the mud, could vaguely be made out against the eastern sky; and Cromwell's Fort was dimly visible; and there was a suggestion of land beyond the unknown belt of sea—no doubt, the Black Isle emerging from its mists. At length the cab was stopped; the three of them descended; and down by the bank they found a substantial gig moored to a post. Clearly all this had been arranged; for the oars were in the boat, and the padlock had been removed from the chain; and so the voyagers took their leave of the land. Lily Neile and Eelin were rowing; and the new refrain was—soprano and contralto—with ineffable anguish intermingled—

'Though I leave thee now in sorrow,
Smiles may light our love to-morrow,
Doomed to part, my faithful heart
A gleam of joy from hope shall borrow.
Ah, ne'er forget, when friends are near,
This heart alone is thine for ever;
Thou may'st find those will love thee dear,
But not a love like mine, O never!'

And now behold! the dawn was beginning to disclose itself over the wide Moray Firth. There was a grey shimmering on the water; the air smelt keen; arrowy flights of sea-birds swept by; the long promontory of Fort George could be made out, by any one familiar with the line of the coast. And still these two pulled on, in fine rhythmical swing; and now and again they repeated their pathetic bewailment

'Though I leave thee now in sorrow'

—or perhaps it was

'I would that my love could silently'

—anything, in short, that their fresh young voices found in unison; while all the world seemed gradually to awake; and the houses and Castle hill of Invernish showed sombre under the ever-increasing canopy of pale blue smoke. It was the Black Isle that appeared first to catch the new day. There were yellow clearances and dark plantations, and an occasional white cottage: they looked human-like, and welcome, and friendly, beyond the forlorn and leaden waste of sea. Poor Morag, seated in the stern of the boat, was wishing herself back in Tobermory again, or on any similar and serviceable piece of land.

In truth, Morag was crying, and Lily Neile, rowing stroke, was the first to perceive the fact.

"Why, Morag, what is the matter?" she called to her. "Are you afraid?"

"Oh, no, Miss, I am not afrait," said Morag, wiping her eyes and trying to stifle her sobs. "And whatever Miss Eelin is wishing me to do, well, I am willing to do—Kott knows that——"

"But what on earth are you crying about?" said the frank-spoken Lily Neile—and by this time the increasing light could reveal to her with what skill she was feathering her oar.

"Well, before I left Tobbermorry," said the agitated lass, "my mother was warning me not to get into dancher——"

"Oh, you silly ass," said Lily Neile, goodnaturedly, "there is no danger at all. Don't you know that Miss Macdonald can swim like an otter? But you needn't disturb yourself. I am going to take your place. It's my

life that Miss Macdonald will save, and you can remain comfortably in the boat. Do you understand that, now? You just sit where you are. Only, you can reach us an oar if you see we are drowning."

"Lily," Eelin Macdonald protested, "this isn't part of the bargain. If Morag is frightened, we can get somebody else, some other morning. But you have no change of clothes——"

"Oh, yes, I have," said Miss Neile, who was a young person of great courage in all these girlish adventures. "I came prepared: nobody ever knows what's going to happen: in that bag is everything both of us could want. Morag can sit in the boat. Eelin, Eelin," she cried, tauntingly, "is it you that's afraid? You that would jump down a tiger's throat to have a wrestle with him inside! Eelin Macdonald, afraid of anything: that would be a joke! Well, we're far enough now; save me or not, here goes. Back, bow, and get the way off her, for that's only playing fair. Are you ready, Nell? Opener sea than this you don't want anywhere: it's a right-down honest trial."

"Look here, Lil," said the oarswoman at the bow, "I think I can undertake to keep you afloat for a minute or two—but no!—oh, no!—I cannot, and will not, undertake to recover your Tam o' Shanter."

"Ah, there's something in that," responded the wise maiden, and she began to withdraw her bonnet-pin. "You know, you're not such a fearful idiot as you look. There's a glimmer of common sense about you sometimes—rarely—but sometimes. You're a microcephalous ape—but there's just a glimmer of sense about you sometimes—"

She placed her grey Tam o' Shanter in the stern.

"I suppose it will be horribly cold when I jump overboard?" she said, apprehensively. "But this is an honest trial, you know; because if I were to hear the ship crunch on to a rock—in the Red Sea, for example—I shouldn't be waiting in my cabin to pin on this blessed Tam. Bow in, there! Enough way! Oh, Eelin Macdonald, wouldn't it be too distressful if they were to see us from the shore, and put out in a boat to rescue us!"

Quite unconsciously she was undoing from her neck an eagle's claw set in silver that her mother had given her, and

as unconsciously she stuck it into the Tam o' Shanter. Something was to be saved from the shipwreck.

"Lily," said Wild Eelin, in a piteous kind of way, "I think we have made a mistake. There is no need for you, or for Morag either, to get wet through. I only wanted to show you how long one can keep in the water with one's clothes on and I can do that well enough—so—so—you just stay where you are—and you'll get some idea of what happens when one is thrown into the sea unexpectedly. I will try to show you what is best to do."

"And you think I am such a ghastly sneak!" exclaimed the other, in open scorn. "Well, Lil, old woman, here's your work cut out for you!"—and with no further word of warning she placed one foot on the gunwale and flung herself over.

The seething water submerged her for not more than a second or two: here she was again, blowing the salt from her lips, and striking about with her hands.

"Oh, don't splash, Lil—don't splash! I'm coming for you!"—and with that Eelin of the sea-blue eyes (she, also, had carefully removed her Tam) dropped over the side. In another moment she had got hold of her friend. "Mind you don't grip me, Lil!" she cried—when she had shaken her head like a Newfoundland dog—"I'm going to save you—I'm going to show you how it's done—but you must sham being insensible—and don't cling to me——"

Now that they were in the water, they found there was a rougher sea on than they could have anticipated, looking from the thwarts; and Eelin had to make a stiff fight for it. Worse than all, the set of the tide was steadily carrying the boat away; and that egregious fool of a woman, Morag, had no thought of putting the oars in the rowlocks, and moving in their direction: indeed she was petrified with fear. And meanwhile—well, no one who has not tried it can tell how terribly difficult it is to hold up another person in water, even for a few seconds—meanwhile Eelin was struggling with her task; and if she was a Newfoundland dog in habit, she was a lioness in heart; she would not confess to herself that there was the slightest risk of danger; she gently plied her way—and Lily Neile was too alarmed to be otherwise than quiescent. The fool Morag let the boat drift. And now, for anyone battling for life—because

that is what it had come to—there was an extraordinary vividness in all things visible around. Fort George was outlined against the sea-horizon. There was sunlight on the Black Isle, and on its yellow clearances. A small steamer making in for the Beauly Firth left a dingy trail of smoke behind it; but it was going away: there was no hope in that direction. And still Wild Eelin strove to give good heart to her faithful friend and ally.

"It's all right, Lil," she managed to say—when the ruffling waves would let her—"it's quite right—we shall be at the boat in a minute—then—then haul yourself in—don't—don't mind me—"

It really was in less than a minute thereafter that they reached the boat; but by this time Eelin was wholly exhausted, and her companion was not in much better case.

"Catch the gunwale, Lil—catch the gunwale!" she gasped. "I'm done. Good—"

It was all of 'Good-bye!' that she could utter; the lapping waves came over her mouth; and when she had done her best to make sure of Lily Neile's safety, she fell away and disappeared—the weight of water in her clothes dragging her down. But Lily Neile was not such a fool as Morag. When she had scrambled into the boat, she breathlessly put an oar into a rowlock, and with one or two rapid strokes shoved the bow round. And when Eelin, in some wild, distracted fashion, came to the surface again, making a final effort to gain a breath of air, well, then, Lily Neile was swift to snatch at the dishevelled blue-black tresses, and she held on—and held on—though she herself was about sinking into utter collapse; and still she held on, until she had got her companion dragged in over the gunwale. Morag's contribution to the performance was a continued fit of hysterical weeping—while the wonder of the dawn unfolded itself, and Fort George shone clear.

It was over the stern that Eelin was dragged in, and there for a few seconds she lay panting. But only for a few seconds. She pulled herself together.

"You see, Lily," she said, in disconnected sentences, "this was more than was bargained for. The boat drifted so far. But I've shown you how it is possible to hold up any one in the water; and you were a brick—you never

splashed—and you never clung. Oh, my, isn't it mortal cold!"

She was shivering.

"Take to your oar, Nell," said her friend, "and let's get back before the whole town of Invernish wakes up. The pulling will warm us."

And so they set to work; but now there was no pathetic 'Though I leave thee now in sorrow,' nor any invitation to go to Altnaherry; because both of them were quite conscious that they had been within easily measurable distance of secrets, of which they did not choose to speak.

"Lil, dear," said Eelin, when she had got well into the swing of her stroke, "it's all very pleasant to say you can hold a drowning person up, but you've got to bargain beforehand that the drowning person shall be Lily Neile——"

"Oh, no thanks," said Miss Neile, through her icicled lips. "I know when I've had enough——"

"But you did it so well!" her companion protested. "You were just admirable. If you had clung round my neck, do you know where we should have been at this minute? Well, I don't; but it wouldn't have been in this here boat. Morag," she said again, "why didn't you put the oars in the rowlocks, and come a bit nearer us?"

"Oh, I could not do that, Miss Eelin, for fear of striking one of the young ladies," said Morag, who had recovered from her whimpering, "and it's not me that would be saving myself, if I could help—and I wass trying to gain attention from the steamer——"

"And do you think we could have gone on board any steamer in this state of clothes?" Miss Eelin demanded—indeed, the two young ladies presented a humiliating spectacle.

But here was the cab still waiting for them on the bank of the river; and there were dry clothes for them to change into, while Morag perched herself up on the box. It is needless to suggest that they shut both windows—for the golden day was now spreading itself abroad, and the wavering blue smoke over the town declared that humanity was astir again. But Eelin said—

"Look here, old lass, is it any good our trying to change in this cramped-up place? You'd much better come

straight home with me; and I'll get you something hot to drink, and you shall have my bed; and I can have a rug on the sofa. But it was worth doing, mind; it was worth doing; if ever you're flung into the sea again, just keep like that—oh, you're a splendid person to save; it's easy to do it with you. Why, they give exhibitions of people who can swim: they ought to give exhibitions of people who know how to be saved from drowning! And I'd back you—against the world! You did splash a bit at first, until I yelled to you."

"Nothing—nothing," said Lily Neile, who also was shivering in her sodden clothes. "The moment I felt your grip, I knew I was safe; and I lay like a lamb, and let you do what you liked."

"It's mercilessly cold, isn't it?" said the one trembling person to the other.

"It is a trifle chilly," answered Miss Neile. "But it's no good trying to change, for here we are at the Cathedral, and in another minute you'll see General Mallock smoking his morning pipe, outside his garden, and what would he think of us if he got a glimpse of us through the window? I'll take your offer, old crock, for I'm frightfully tired and cold; but I won't rob you of your bed; you give me a blanket, and I'll know what to do. And my folks won't worry, for I warned them I was going off on a skylark with a hideous maniac called Eelin Macdonald, and they'll be prepared for anything."

The sun was warm on the oak gate, and the gravel drive, and the red stone frontage as they drove up; and as Morag was benumbed and mostly asleep, it was Jane, the parlour-maid (in terrible consternation) who had to look after these half-drowned scapegraces; and about the last thing that Wild Eelin saw—after she had wrapped rugs and ulsters over her friend—was Fergus out in the silver-shining water, fishing over towards the Devil's Kirn. And for the moment she thought she would give ten years of her life away if only she could throw as beautiful a line as that.

CHAPTER XLVI.

'THE BRAES OF GLENBRAON.'

But when Eelin had put her friend to bed, and wrapped her up, and wished her happy slumbers, it did not occur to her to do anything of a similar kind for herself; because the morning was gloriously fine; and she was an eager, insatiable kind of creature; and out there in the sunlight she saw pedantic old Maxwell, at whom she could mock; moreover, and this was the most important, she knew a secret corner up by the wall of the kitchen-garden where there still lingered a few unconsidered raspberries, of which she could make an excellent breakfast. So she went into her dressing-room, and changed her attire, and passed stealthily from the house. The golden warmth and the fresh air were like wine to her. Now and again she shivered a little, but she took no notice.

As she was thieving the raspberries—reaching here and there at branches above her head—old Maxwell came along with his barrow, and he was so patronising as to linger for a moment.

"Well, Maxwell," said she, turning round, "have you discovered any more murder-stories to frighten the maids with? Why, man, you don't know the very ground-work of that theory of yours! The transmotion of souls—what's that? Did you never hear of metempsychosis?"

The Scotch gardener looked suspicious. He was used to the jeers of this young madam.

"Why," she said, with her great blue eyes expressing profound astonishment, "it was a familiar doctrine thousands of years ago; all the great philosophers preached it—Plato, and Socrates, and Antigone, and Ornithorhyncus, and Cum Grano Salis, and all the rest of them—and they maintained

that after death the soul of a man might possibly inhabit the body of an animal. Now that's something serious; that's very serious; that's more serious than imagining you can keek a cloy, or cloy a keek, or whatever it is; and for this reason, that what the mind dwells on often happens. That is well-known and recognised. Artaxerxes declares it in his School Board Dictionary. And if you were to give up your transmotion of souls and take to the established metempsychosis of the great and wise men of all the centuries, where would you land yourself? Supposing your spirit were to find itself in a moo-cow—what then?"

"A wad fecht ma way oot," said Maxwell, sturdily.

"That might be bad for the coo," said Miss Eelin, on reflection, and she turned to her rasps, while he went on with his barrow. She called him back. "Look here, Maxwell, people far more learned than you or I have given up these problems as hopeless; and I think you might too—instead of frightening the maidservants with them."

"Ay, it's Morag ye're thinking o', Miss Eelin, is't no that?" said Maxwell, gloomily. "And I wonder what in the world would frichten her, the Hielan bizzom!"

When Eelin had re-entered the house, her mother had just come down to breakfast, and it was the girl's delight to wait upon her, with little ministrations and caresses and kindly words.

"But, Eelin, your hands are deadly cold!" exclaimed the ever-apprehensive mother. "And you're all shivering—"

"I had my breakfast in the open air, Mummie, and what could be splendider—there's a corner I know that Maxwell hasn't stripped—and if you go inside the bushes, and look out, that's the way to get rasps—"

"But what is this mad adventure of the morning I have heard about?" was the next and natural question.

"Nothing mad!—a work of public utility," was the rejoinder. "Trying how to save people from shipwreck—what more practical and useful?"

"I wish you would go to bed all the same."

"Why, Lily Neile is in my bed," was the objection.

"Then you can go into mine. Or they could get the yellow room ready for you in three minutes—"

"Oh, Mummie, on such a swingeing day!" the daughter cried. "I wonder if I could find old Fergus: there's a

Zulu trout-fly that I'm sure would do the trick in this clear weather—Mr. Watson tied them for me—I'll back them against anything—" And so she went on, in her gay audacity of youth; it was her mother who regarded her with some concern; she knew better what these occasional shiverings might portend.

None the less, when her mother had finished breakfast, Miss Eelin set off for the town; and no one, observing her gait, would have thought she had suffered anything from her dip in the Moray Firth. Nay, she was reciting to herself, in a proud kind of way, the sad ending of Gilderoy—

> 'Alas! that e'er such Laws were made,
> To hang a Man for Gear;
> Either for stealing Cow or Sheep,
> Or yet for Horse or Mare:
> Had not the Laws then been so strict,
> I had never lost my Joy;
> But now he lodges with auld *Nick*,
> That hang'd my *Gilderoy*.'

And in Castle-street she was busy with her purchases; and here and there a pensioner had to be visited, to be cheered up a bit by bantering—and opening of windows; and then again at the corner of Bridge-street, she had the luck to run against Archie Gilchrist, who produced from his pocket the first batch of proofs of the volume about Tannahill and Hector Macneill. Now Miss Eelin, in her brief and erratic career as an authoress, had certainly seen proofs, but they were long strips of things from the *Observer* office; these were the first book-proofs she had seen, and she regarded them with such interest that she made no scruple about stepping into the shop of a jeweller hard by (he was a friend of hers) in order to examine them more minutely. It seemed all so different from what she had written. She feared it looked hard, and stupid, and cold; the public would not lend a measure of softening sympathy; and the publishers would lose, and might even convey reproach. And yet she turned over the pages with a vague delight; and here and there she marked felicities of phrase which she knew well enough were the interpolations of her coadjutor—slyly inserted, so as not to wound her pride. And she liked the big type, so different from that of the newspaper-office. And she did not understand, as she went

from sheet to sheet, that Archie Gilchrist had his eyes upon her, in a strangely wistful way, as if wondering what the future held for him and her. It was not of Tannahill and Hector Macneill he was thinking.

"Oh, look here, Archie," she said, startling him out of his reverie. "See what they have printed—'Yet sweeter and fairer and clear to this bosom'—'clear'—'clear!'—"

"Oh, never mind that," he answered her. "I'll go over the proofs carefully. Don't you trouble."

"But," said she, bravely, "if you are going to do all the work, it is your name that must appear on the titlepage."

"You have done most of the writing, Eelin," said he.

"Well, let's make a compromise," said she. "It has always seemed to me rather shabby for small writers to try to win a reputation for themselves by clinging on to the coat-tails of the great writers—introductions, biographies, selections, new editions, and always with the small writer's name conspicuous on the titlepage. Now suppose at the end of the preface you and I simply put our initials—'A. G.' 'E. M.'—wouldn't that be a little more modest?"

"I am glad to be associated with you in any way, Eelin," he answered; and more he could not say; for two customers had come into the shop, and it was but time for the young scribblers to go.

Then, all her business settled, in various directions, she hurried away home; and here was Lily Neile come downstairs, and as it was just about lunch-time, she was persuaded to stay; and thereafter they telephoned for a cab, and she was driven away quite happy and content, just as if she had never been in the Moray Firth that morning. All the while Wild Eelin had been in a curiously unquiet mood, suggesting diverse projects, and darting from one subject to another.

"When Archie and I are married," she said to her mother, these two being now together in the drawing-room, "we must give up one day each week to the Nibelunglied—a new translation into English. I mean—to get it as near perfection as may be, though it may be far enough off. And this afternoon I must devote to Heine; I want to have another try at the 'Grenadiere'—and perhaps a little polishing at the 'Kevlaar'—though it is so horribly difficult—"

"My dearest Eelin," the mother entreated, "don't meddle with Heine to-day; you know it invariably makes you so nervous and excited; and you'll be lying awake all night thinking of words and turns of words. No, no; go away and find old Fergus, as you suggested, and get into his boat, and see if between you you can't bring us back a few sea-trout. That's better than Heine. Oh, by the way, speaking of Fergus, there's a letter from Mr. Somerled Macdonald——"

"But not for me, of course," said Eelin, hotly.

"Well, no; he certainly addressed it to me, but the news is general news——"

"If I offered to sever my head from my neck, he would not send me a line of writing!" she cried, with some exaggeration of bitterness.

"Much good it would do you then!" said the mother, laughing; she was trying to soothe down this highly-strung young person. "He only wanted to tell me that he has found a permanent situation for Angus, the water-bailiff; and there's a good wage, and a fairly comfortable cottage, and as much peat as ever he likes to cut. Then his daughter is coming from Ben Vora to keep house for him; all very satisfactory. But why should he send such details to me? Why not to you? Well, then, my dear infant, I'll tell you. You frightened him. He thought you were too proud to be spoken to——"

"And I am," she said, vehemently. "I am too proud to be spoken to—by some persons. But that's nothing. That's nothing. The pilgrimage to Kevlaar is more to the purpose—if one could get anywhere near to the simplicity and feeling of it——"

"Oh, no, Eelin, darling," the mother pleaded, "keep away from Heine, for this afternoon, at least! You tell me what lines you are thinking of, and I will make a literal translation for you, and then you can versify and beautify later on."

"Oh, but, Mummie, I have just been versifying!—and you'll never guess what! I have been trying to find some English words for 'The Braes of Glenbraon.' They're dreadfully bad, I know; for one thing the measure is so unusual; but then as they will never leave the strict seclusion of these premises, it does not much matter. Oh,

I dare say if Archie Gilchrist were to see them, he would want to publish them ; for all my geese are swans to him ; but I cannot let him injure his own property in the newspaper ; indeed, I have been thinking of putting an end to the 'White Cockade' contributions altogether, they are too frivolous and impertinent——"

"They are the brightest things in the paper!" said Mrs. Macdonald, warmly—of course, she was a quite impartial judge.

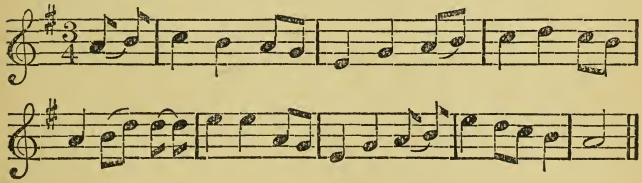
"But about the 'Braes of Glenbraon'——"

"Some other day—some other day, Eelin, dear," the mother implored, with an instinctive dread.

"Do you prefer the West Ross-shire version of the melody, or the Argyleshire?" the girl went on, and she crossed to the open piano, unobservant of her mother's anxiety.

"Some other day, Eelin, dear, some other day!"

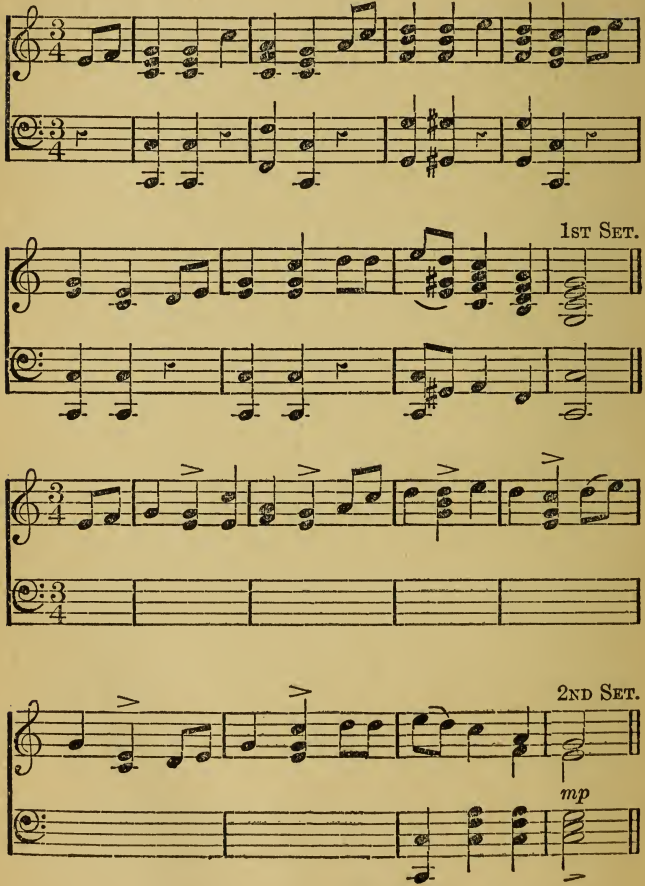
For of all the wild sad airs that float about the Western Highlands that of the Bruthaichean Ghlinn Braoin is the most penetratingly wild and sad—when it is properly played ; and Eelin Macdonald had enough of the Celtic sensitiveness to understand ; there was no staccato hop, skip, and jump in her music, even when, as now, she dabbed out the notes with one finger. This was the West Ross-shire version :



As so given there was surely nothing to rend the heart ; it was only an indication of what might be made of the air by harmonising ; and so far the apprehensive Bean-an-Tighearn was consoled. But it was different when Eelin sat down to the piano, and said—

"I think the Argyleshire version is the more pathetic of the two ; and I am going to let you hear some of the lines I have written—in strict confidence, you know, Mummie—in confidence——"

And then in a low voice, so as to be almost unheard, and slowly, and with an exquisite expression of tenderness, she sang the Argyleshire "Braes of Glenbraon"——



and these are some of the idle words she had written—

All lonely I ponder,
For far away yonder
It's there we would wander:
O the Braes of Glenbraon!

In the warm sunny weather,
On the slopes of red heather,
We lay there together:
O the Braes of Glenbraon!

—but long before she had finished the first verse, the poor mother had burst out crying—silently—to herself—behind the shelter of a book: and then, to conceal her sobbing, she went quickly to the nearest window, and pretended to be occupied in watching the movements of old Maxwell, who was weeding some flower-plot. Unfortunately Eelin chanced to follow, and in great consternation, as she linked her arm within her mother's arm, saw that tears were running down her cheeks.

"Why, mother," she exclaimed, "what has happened?"

"It seems to me," she answered, in trembling tones, "that the man or woman who thought of that air must have died in heartbroken misery; and it is not fit for a young girl, just entering upon her life, to have such unhappiness in her mind."

"Mother, dear, a silly old song to put you about like that! And it isn't misery: it's only the recollection of former joy. Well, I will never sing 'The Braes of Glenbraon' again, if that will please you." And then she continued, in an absent kind of way: "I do not even know where they are, those Braes of Glenbraon. There never have been any Braes of Glenbraon for me; and there never will be." And then again she added, with a courageous blitheness: "But I'm no minding!"

She was unsettled and fidgety as she went about the room; and at length she was forced to go and lie down on the couch, because her head was so bad. But she made a gallant fight for it, lest her mother should be further alarmed.

"Mummie," she said, with a forced kind of laugh, "shall I tell you what you are thinking of? You are thinking of sending for Doctor McIlvaine, simply because of these

ridiculous shiverings. Now listen, and I will explain, and you will save the doctor's fee. My dear mother, you don't understand small boys. But I do. I'm awfully fond of them; and I know their ways and their tricks. You're too haughty, that's what's the matter with you; they wouldn't have you for a chum. They don't mind me—though I was in disfavour for a while, because I slapped the cheeks of the biggest of them, when he was thrashing the small goal-keeper."

She put her hand to her forehead in a wearied sort of way, and her mother was quick to bring pungent lavender-water.

"Now, lie still, Eelin dear, and you'll tell me about the small boys later on!"

"But I want to explain, Mummie, darling," she said, rather fretfully, "so that you need not concern yourself about these abominable shivers. And this is it. When the small boys are off on an expedition to bathe, each one of them before leaving home manages to snick a piece of bread, or a corner of cheese, or a biscuit; and that they carefully hide in their pocket and preserve. For why? That is their 'chittering-bit.' And as soon as they have come out of the water, each one of them puts his 'chittering-bit' into his mouth and munches it, and that stops the shivers and shakes. Oh, it is well-known!—not to you, of course—not to the haughty lady of Glengarva House: but the young rascals rather chum with me, and I have learnt something of their games. And then, you see, Mummie, neither Lily Neile nor I had a 'chittering-bit' this morning; we did not think of it; and that's the origin of the shivers and shakes, and they are not of the least importance. But my head—my head—I think somebody must have poured quicksilver into it—for it goes this way and that—and yet it is so heavy——"

"Eelin," said the mother, with an unusual assumption of authority, "I insist on your going to bed this very minute—" and she caught the girl's arm, and assisted her to rise, and took her upstairs. When she had seen her comfortably bestowed, and the pillow arranged for the pained head, then the Bean-an-Tighearn went instantly downstairs—and of course at once sent for the doctor.

In due course Dr. McIlvaine arrived—a tall, thin, grave personage, with an extreme alertness of eye which he

generally managed to conceal. Before going to see his patient, he was told of the morning's escapade. He did not say anything. He and Mrs. Macdonald proceeded to the room.

When they returned, he said slowly—

"Well, I don't see any immediate cause for alarm. No doubt there is a certain amount of fever, that might be caused by a sudden shock to the system—jumping over the side of a boat, for example—"

"But, doctor," the distressed mother said, "Eelin is as used to the water as a Newfoundland dog! And she can dive like a seal—and swim like a duck: surely that could not have been the cause? And as for the few minutes' drive home, without changing, certainly that was a great imprudence—still, for one of Eelin's constitution and out-of-door habits—"

The doctor sate silent for a second or two, thrumming the tips of his fingers. Then he suddenly looked up, with one of his swift, veiled, inquiring glances.

"Mrs. Macdonald, pardon my asking: but has your daughter been undergoing any severe mental distress of late?"

"N—no—not that I know of," said the gentle-spoken widow—and yet she blushed guiltily. "Of course, girls have their secrets; and one may surmise; yes, and one may be quite wrong. One cannot hurt a girl's feelings by being too intrusive; even if you were on the right track you would only the more surely wound her. There are some sacred things. She has her rights and dignities. She ought to be allowed the refuge of silence, even from her mother."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, "all that you say is prompted by excellent reason and sympathy. But of course I have to regard the case from a professional point of view, and I want to understand a little more, if possible. Now pardon me if again I ask a rude question: isn't your daughter engaged to be married to Mr. Gilchrist of the *Observer?* I would not mention such a thing, only that I heard her confidential friends, the Neiles, talking about it openly, as if there were no secret whatever—"

"Nor is there—not the slightest!" the mother answered him, openly.

"Has the engagement been broken off?" he asked again, with a quick, bird-like look of interrogation.

"Oh, no, oh, no!" she assured him. "Nor is there a thought of such a thing on either side: that I am certain of."

The doctor took up his hat and rose from his chair.

"I will look in to-morrow morning," he said, "to see how things are going: I hope well. I trust well."

She followed him through the hall: the door was wide open: the pleasant autumn scent came in from the garden. On the top of the steps he turned.

"You don't know of any recent and sudden agitation—apart from this life-saving adventure?" he asked of her.

"Only this," answered the mother, bursting into tears and hiding her face, "that in the afternoon—she was—she was singing 'The Braes of Glenbraon'; and if you had heard her you would have said it was the cry of a broken heart."

CHAPTER XLVII.

LABYRINTHS.

NEXT morning there was a pale, cold, clammy fog hanging about, especially over the woods: the eye was glad to seek for relief in the orange glow of the half-sodden marigolds in the garden-plots, or even in the wind-drift of copper-coloured leaves, through which peeped here and there the strong clear green of the none-so-pretty. Dr. McIlvaine, as he walked out along the banks of the river, was considering certain things that had lain in his mind from the previous day. A dip in the Moray Firth was not likely to have caused such a complete nervous breakdown. No, nor even the imprudent drive home. Nor yet the singing of a Gaelic air. No; but where there was mischief lying latent in the system—and mischief of some standing, ready to declare itself at any moment—might not the singing of the Gaelic air have been, so to speak, the pulling of the trigger?

When he arrived at the house and had visited his patient, he appeared to have little new to report, beyond a certain rise of temperature; only, he recommended that a day nurse should be engaged, besides the night nurse he had already sent out, so as to give some relief to the trembling mother. As for the girl upstairs in her room, she did not seem to care. She wished to be left alone. She lay with her hand to her forehead, moaning a little now and again when she fancied no one was near. Wild Eelin was no longer wild, or audacious, or braggart; she was in complete collapse; the moanings were like the moanings of some despairing soul, anxious only to get away from its mortal tenement.

But on the afternoon of the following day something different occurred.

"Nurse," she called, in her husky voice, and she tried to raise herself somewhat, and in the wave-blue eyes burned 'the light that never was on sea or land'—"who is that little boy on the window-sill?"

"Oh, one of the usual ones," said the practised nurse, and she propped up the pillow.

"But he is all white, and he has got wings, and he is carrying a case of golf-clubs under his arms!"

"Oh, yes, most of them are like that," said the nurse. "Don't you bother about him, Miss Eelin. He'll be flying off to Nairn directly. He'll be off to the links with the rest of them. So just you lie quiet, and never mind him. Shut your eyes, Miss Eelin, and I'm sure you'll never see him again."

Well, she obediently did shut her eyes, but she continued to talk, in a rambling, incoherent fashion, with short, panting breaths between the sentences:

"I should not have slapped his cheeks, even if he was hitting the small boy. It was unladylike. My mother would not have done that. But then—but then—I've always gone blundering, and doing wrong. Always doing wrong—always—always. And I should not mind so much about the other people, if only I could make some atonement to my mother, who has been so patient and forgiving. If only she would give me absolution for everything that's gone by—then—then I could slip off—and be in nobody's way. Lily," she said, mistaking the nurse for Lily Neile—"do you know what my mother renounced for my sake? Why, we might have been back in Kinvaig—Lord Mountmahon could have managed it—and he was willing—the old Macdonalds of Kinvaig—back in Glengarva—oh, and just imagine what a horrible beast I am—I did think of it, for a moment—yes, I did—I told you a lie, Lily—for I asked myself what was the sacrifice of an insignificant person like me compared with the keeping of the historical associations. Oh, and then the sweet mother stepped in and refused; and when I knew I was not to marry that fearful creature that goes about with his bullies, I think I went a little bit off my head with the frantic joy of it. You see, I did not know whether to laugh or cry, and I

went up the Castle hill, and all the world was ringed with gold—gold—gold—gold along the Black Isle—and along the Beauly Firth—and away up by Ben Wyvis; and I wished well to everyone living in the world—indeed, indeed I did!—my heart was so happy, and grateful, and thankful—"

The nurse tried to soothe her down, and she rested for a while; when she resumed, she was talking to herself, in these inaudible gasps.

"I know that—that I married Archie Gilchrist out of ambition; and I suppose that was wrong too—always wrong—always wrong; but I thought—I thought I could cheer him up a bit on the way—and he is going far. He is going far—he has the large outlook. Lily, dear, are you listening?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Eelin," said the nurse, bending over her and putting a cool hand on the hot forehead, "but I wouldn't trouble any more at present. It's all arranged and quite satisfactory. I shouldn't wonder if you got some sleep now!"

"Ah, but listen—listen—about Archie Gilchrist—it's all very well to hear a farm-lass singing one of your songs—but—but he has the wider outlook. And it isn't merely fame either—no, no—not merely to have people talk about you; but—but—but if you have the consciousness that you have done your best for your day and generation—however little—however little—and if you know that all over the world—in Melbourne—and Ceylon—and San Francisco—and—ah, but I cannot remember the other places—my head being so bad—but if you know that all over the world there were people who regarded you in a kindly way—perhaps even with affection—because of your writings—who were grateful to you for having done your best for your own times—isn't—isn't that something worth living and striving and dying for? And Archie will win to that—oh, yes, I am certain—and if I can cheer him up a bit—what else is left for me—what better could I do? Oh, it is a splendid thing to make a name for yourself that is regarded with affection all over the world; and even that single piece of Archie's that has been quoted everywhere—but I cannot remember what he called it—my head being so painful—well, I beg your pardon—I beg your

pardon——." And with that she turned wearily away, and hid her face in the pillow.

Her murmurings were not always so intelligible; sometimes they consisted of the mere repetition of a word—the brain trying and failing to find expression; and always as the head fell back, there was the plaintive apology—"Well, I cannot remember—and I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon!" And sometimes she thought she was talking to Lily Neile, and sometimes to her mother, and sometimes to the nurse; but always when they could gather the meaning of these darkened phrases, there was this expression of sorrow—this desire to make reparation—this appeal for forgiveness to all whom she had injured. The mother took these piteous pleadings as if they were real, and wept bitterly; the nurse was a more judicious attendant. And so the time went on, and the fever ran its course, and not a footfall was heard on any staircase or on any corridor—for Wild Eelin, though she was too ready with her quips and sarcasms, was yet pretty well liked by the people in this house. Morag, the heavy lass from Mull, was as noiseless as any of them; she stole about on tip-toe, in her stocking-soles.

Next morning the wandering brain was off on another tack; and the poor mother, whose agonised listening put far too much importance on these vague utterances, could not make out what all this meant concerning lonely hills, and martyrs' graves, and the calling of curlews and plovers. Glenmuir, too—where was Glenmuir?—what could Eelin know about Glenmuir? And Airdsmoss—and the Covenanters? For the truth is, Eelin of the eyes like the seawave had never evinced much interest in the Covenanters, except as a historical phenomenon; she knew next to nothing of the South of Scotland; she was a great deal more familiar with the Conca d'oro than with the Canongate; she could have shown a stranger the treasures of Boulak, but Paisley—to her regret, no doubt—she had never beheld; if she had addressed an Edinburgh porter or cab-driver, he would most certainly have taken her for an Englishwoman. And why, therefore, this rambling talk about Wardlaw and Cairntable—and the standard of Zion—and the pesewepes crying about the lonely graves? Well, it was by the merest accident that the mother obtained the

key to this enigma. She was out in the garden, waiting and watching for the doctor; and in her helpless anxiety, she kept wandering to and fro; and so by chance she passed the now disused summer-house. There was a volume lying on the table, face downward; the careless Eelin had no doubt left it there; and so the mother took it up to see what she had been reading; and here, at once, was the solution of the mystery. It was Hislop's "Cameronian's Dream" that the girl had been looking at, and that had left a last impress on an excited brain.

> 'In a dream of the night I was wafted away
> To the muirland of mist where the martyrs lay;
> Where Cameron's sword and his Bible are seen
> Engraved on the stone where the heather grows green.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And in Glenmuir's wild solitude, lengthened and deep,
> Were the whistling of plovers and bleating of sheep.'

And then the mother went quickly indoors and stole up to the sick chamber. There was still some muttered talk about the pesewepes crying and the lonely graves—and soon a quiet palm was put on the burning forehead, and a smooth voice was speaking:

"Yes, yes, Eelin, darling, what you say is quite true; but it happened a long time ago; and you must not mind. You're quite right, you know; I daresay the plovers are calling there over the tombstones; but that doesn't concern you, does it?—for all you've got to do is to lie still and sleep a little and get well."

"Yes, yes"—they heard the whispered answer, as they tried to follow her through the dim labyrinths. "That was you, Mummie, with the silken voice. Well, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon. I have always been doing wrong. I know it. I am sorry. I beg your pardon—oh, yes, yes—I ask your pardon—I ask for your pardon——"

The mother was a bad attendant; the nurse had to persuade her to go away; she could sit in the adjoining dressing-room if she wished—and 'cry her fill.' For sometimes Miss Eelin was not so much of an invalid—only that she spoke with difficulty, and had a tendency to hold her hand over her chest, as if there were a deep-seated pain there. Nay, she talked quite cheerfully at times, in that hushed, troubled way.

"Nurse," she said, "are you a good swimmer? I—I used to be—before my head got bad, you know. And I wish you would bring out my swimming things—they're in the cupboard there—the top drawer—and the felt slippers—they're at the bottom. I only want to look at them—and to remember. Because, you understand, don't you, Lily Neile and the rest of them challenged me—challenged me to swim from the Devil's Kirn to the foot of the weir—and—and I failed: oh, yes, I failed; I was crying when I came on to the shingle again—though they did not see it. But some day—I will—I will—"

"Oh, yes, of course, Miss Eelin," said the nurse, in her quiet tones. "I've heard of your swimming—there's none of them can swim like you—"

"No, no, I don't say that, Lily," she answered, moaning. "I've always failed. How many yards can you throw?—and I can only manage twenty-five—clean—twenty-five, clean—and Archie Gilchrist says it is a good enough line for the Nish—from a boat—but he always—he always apologises for me—"

Then for a while she was silent; but of a sudden she flung herself up, and with the dark blue eyes staring wildly, she sang aloud and clear—

All lonely I ponder,
For far away yonder,
It's there we would wander:
O the Braes of Glenbraon!

The miraculous effort was beyond her strength; she fell back; the husky voice resumed its sway; and what the nurse could now make out was something about "Oh, my head is not so well—and I beg pardon—I ask for pardon—and I have always told Lily she could throw a better line than I could—oh, yes, of course—of course! And I beg your pardon—I am so sorry for the trouble. I wish to thank you—I—I wish to thank you—oh, yes, indeed—but my head is not well—I ask for your pardon—"

Not once, during all these delirious ramblings, did she mention the name of Somerled Macdonald; nay, in some inscrutable way, she managed to avoid it; for she was conscious of the presence of the two men up at Alt-na-Traive; but it was only of the elder Macdonald she would speak.

"A blue and silver phantom is the best for trolling," she

said—or tried to say—"and a small size—especially now—when the salmon in the loch are worth nothing—but there may be a good basket of sea-trout, and that is what I would wish for Mr. Macdonald. The poor blind man; my heart is heavy when I think of him; and yet he has done what he could for his kinsfolk and his name; he must know that; that must comfort him; and the thanks of all the people he has helped. I—I used to sit with him in the verandah—of the hotel—in the sunlight—and—and I could give him some idea of what was happening below—when Fergus was lashing the water—and the lads looking on. Oh, I tell you the bank—the bank is very steep—near to the suspension-bridge—and—and if you have no boat, then there's nothing but the Spey cast—are you listening to me, Lil, darling?"

"Oh, yes," said the nurse, gently.

"Ay, you do it well—you do it well—even Fergus not much better—but it is better to have the boat. Are you there, nurse?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Miss Eelin," was the ready answer.

"Well, if it is not too much trouble—and I ask your pardon—will you get out my swimming things and the felt slippers, and put them at the foot of the bed? Oh, but I must conquer the Devil's Kirn yet—when I get a little better. You see, it's the only thing I can do, in a kind of way. Lily Neile throws a far better line: and Archie Gilchrist—oh, well, he's not to be compared with any of them, for he is a man of genius, and I know what lies ahead for him. Oh, thank you, nurse, I like to look at my swimming things—and—and when I ask you to fetch me 'The Braes of Glenbraon'—from the music on the piano in the drawing-room—mind you go and hunt it up. You will find it somewhere—somewhere—and don't come back till you have it in your hands. 'The Braes of Glenbraon'—remember."

And then she relapsed into silence. But with the abnormal astuteness of a distraught brain she had laid her plans only too well.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE FATES.

Mountmahon and his gang of bullet-heads had fled away to the south : what did Archie Gilchrist care ? He asked his lawyers to abandon the proceedings that had been begun : why should he care ? There came to him the proofs of a small volume of his verses that an Edinburgh publisher had undertaken to issue : he could not read a line of them. The visionary towers of Westminster Abbey had disappeared from the horizon : they did not concern him. His very existence seemed to be bound up within the walls of Glengarva House ; and yet he was no obtrusive visitor ; rather he held himself aloof ; he would noiselessly sneak along the gravel path, and look for somebody who could give him news ; and then, if there was nobody, he never thought of ringing the bell ; he would as noiselessly retire, and go away round by the small suspension-bridges to the Islands, from whence he could keep watch on the red house and its green Venetian blinds. With a dog-like fidelity of affection he would remain there, no one tossing him a crumb of comfort. Occasionally, it is true, he would bethink him of his duties ; and generally he had a bundle of papers and manuscripts in his pocket ; and these he would mechanically attempt to examine. Here, for example, was an article on 'Statesmen who have proclaimed themselves failures' ; and it was written, in an elaborately pungent style, by a member of the Assassins' Club ; but when he came to read of this distinguished politician who had ruined a great reputation by his insensate aim at dismembering the empire, or of that less distinguished politician who had attempted to govern England by uttering a series of little jests, his brain refused to follow. The

murmur of the wide, silver-glancing stream spoke to him of something quite different. Over yonder, behind the terraced trees, was the house that claimed his eyes. And well he knew this: that all his trumpery ambitions and desires—yes, and his life too—he would willingly and gladly surrender if only for one brief moment he could see Eelin Macdonald, in her resolute frankness of youth and health, come swinging along by the laurel bushes and out by the open gate, and chanting to herself, as she was most likely to do, something about

> 'Is your war-pipe asleep, MacCrimmon?
> Is your war-pipe asleep, and for ever, MacCrimmon?
> Shall the pibroch that welcomed the foe to Ben-aer,
> Be hushed when we seek the dark wolf in his lair,
> To give back our wrongs to the giver?'

That was more the Wild Eelin of former days. The fact is, the latest reports had not been quite as favourable; and his heart was like bursting within him.

One morning his river-side solitude was broken in upon by two visitors; and the current being high, and the wind from the south, the noise of the weir was such that they had approached him before he was aware. They were the night-nurse, Mary Kendrick, out for her accustomed stroll, and Janet Forsyth, who had some idea of taking up the same profession, and was anxious to know how she should set about qualifying. The paths through the Islands wind a good deal; and it is probable that the two girls, so far from having any intention of intruding, would much have preferred to follow their own way along the bank, but the moment he saw them he jumped to his feet, and, addressing the night-nurse, said—

"Well?"

It was all he could utter. He was trembling a little, and his face had got rather white—for these solitary musings and gazings do not strengthen the nerves.

The prim, pretty little nurse, in all the morning freshness of her costume, looked startled, and rather drew back.

"About Miss Macdonald?" she said, timidly.

"Yes, yes!"

"But you understand, Mr. Gilchrist," said she—for she knew him slightly as a friend of Janie Forsyth's—"we are not allowed to make any report except to the doctor. It is

the doctor you must ask—or some one in the house. It would hardly do for a nurse to come out of a sick-room, and begin talking about the case—now, would it?"

"Oh, my God," he cried. "Is she worse?" And the agony of his appeal went straight to the heart of Janie Forsyth.

"Mary Kendrick," said she, "my mother and your mother were cousins, and I know what they would think of such a refusal, coming from any one of their kith and kin. Oh, well I know. They would say it was unwomanly. Yes, they would. They would say that. For you are aware of the relationship between Miss Macdonald and Mr. Gilchrist; and surely he is the very first one to be told, whatever is the true state of affairs. And what were you saying to me not five minutes ago, when we were crossing the bridge?"

The fresh-complexioned little nurse blushed consciously, but still she clung to her professional attitude.

"If you were to call over at the house," she suggested.

"I cannot keep plaguing them at the house," said he. "Surely they have enough trouble there."

She hesitated for another second or so, and then she said,

"Well, would you care to have my opinion, for what it is worth? And you won't tell the doctor I said anything about the case. Because it isn't right, you know—it isn't right: my opinion may be worth nothing."

"But what do you think—what do you think, Miss Kendrick—you yourself—you personally?" he urged upon her.

"If it comes to that," she answered him a little more boldly, "I should say she was getting along excellently well."

He could have fallen on his knees and worshipped her; for the mind of this young man was not well-ordered during these days.

And then the prim little nurse, finding that the heavens had not fallen upon her for her indiscretion, became a little more confidential; and Gilchrist besought the two girls to take a seat on the bench beside him; he did not wish to lose a single word through the rushing noise of the weir.

"Oh, she speaks often of you," continued the demure young person, stumbling headlong into further revelations:

perhaps she had a natural sympathy for young lovers: perhaps she had been stung by Janet Forsyth's reproach. "That is, when we can make out what she is saying. And she thinks that you and she are married; and that you are to go away to London and be a great man; and she is to look on and admire. She has said that again and again; and I have been able to understand so far; but generally her talk is about bits of old songs—though her memory does not carry her further than a line or two—because of course we don't encourage her—we try to pacify her. Oh, there's another thing—there's a poetry-book coming out, she says, and she wants to know if you are going to dedicate it to her—"

"I have the proofs in my pocket!" he exclaimed. "But I never thought of any dedication to her; it would be too much presumption; I was waiting to put her name on something better—"

"I have told her you would dedicate the book to her," said the little nurse, placidly, "and she seemed pleased. So, if you should see her, you must be prepared—"

"Oh, do you think I could see her—for but a moment!—for but a moment!" he entreated.

But again the nurse drew back in alarm.

"Oh, that is not for me to say. That would be for the doctor—or her mother, perhaps. I wouldn't advise it myself. She would most likely take you for someone else—some stranger, perhaps—and that would aggravate the fever. I mean, I myself think so; and my opinion is of no value; you might ask the doctor—"

"But couldn't I even look at her for one second?" he pleaded. "I would stand behind a screen—I only want to hear the sound of her voice—"

"You couldn't make out anything, unless you were accustomed," said the nurse. "Bits of old songs, for the most part; only, when she comes to the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—do you know that one?"

"Do I know the 'Bruthaichean Ghlinn Braoin?'" said he—for both of them were of Highland birth and breeding.

"Ay, that's the terrible time we have, for she breaks into a despair of sobbing, and it is so difficult to stop. I fear the 'Braes of Glenbraon' more than anything; and I don't understand why it should affect her so. But when

she talks about you, she is more contented. She has great hopes ; and there's some big cathedral or abbey in London where you are to have a tablet or a monument or something of that kind, and she is to come and place flowers. Mr. Gilchrist, don't heed what I am saying ; these wanderings don't mean much ; and I have no right to tell you—only Janie Forsyth seemed to think I might—"

"But more—more," he begged, with hungry ears.

"There is little more," she said, "that can rightly be made out. She seems to wish to ask the pardon of every one she has injured—as if she ever could willingly have injured anybody ! And mostly her talk is about you—and books—and fame—and London—and the great figure you are to become there, amongst the literary people. Oh, yes, that's all right ; that's quite cheerful in a way. But I do not like it when she begins about the Braes of Glenbraon ; I do not like her bursting into sobs ; for there is something behind that I can't make out, and she refuses to be comforted. No, nor does her mother understand. There is something dark and hidden. But then again that often happens in fever—and without any real reason ; so I trust, Mr. Gilchrist, you will put no value on my words—only, you seemed distressed about not hearing the news—and you will forget what I have been telling you—and think we were merely having a claverclash on an idle morning."

"I am grateful to you," he said—he could say no more.

And then the two girls rose, and he did not seek to detain them : no doubt they were returning to the house. When they had left he set off for the town. In a lane near the corner of Union-street a poor woman was singing 'Thou bonnie wood o' Craigielea.' It is not one of Tannahill's best ; and the woman could sing no more than a tin cow ; but then—there were associations ; he hastily fumbled in his pockets, and found a shilling, and that he gave her, and hurried on—lest she should see his filled eyes. He was all undone.

He walked about until he could pull himself together a bit, and then he entered the office, and went straight to the composing room.

"Mr. Forbes," said he to the head compositor, "which of your lads do you take to be the best Gaelic scholar ?"

"It's Duncan Munro there," was the instant answer.

"There's no doubt about that. He has taken prizes at the Argyllshire *Môd*, and Lord Archibald himself made him a compliment."

The Editor went over to this lad, Munro, who was rather a pallid youth, with leadened fingers and stained apron.

"Look here, Munro," said he, "I want you to do me a favour. Will you write out for me a literal translation—an absolutely literal translation—of the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—the *Bruthaichean Ghlinn Braoin*, you know——"

"Oh, yes, I will, sir," replied the young man, quickly: he was extremely flattered.

"You understand," said the Editor, "that it is not for publication—neither in this nor in any other paper; it is a kindness to me personally; I want to know what each phrase means, word by word; you see, the Gaelic that I have is not good enough for that. And don't attempt any rhyme, as if it were to be printed; only the literal meaning of every line: search for the real meaning; and don't try to make poetry: do you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir, perfectly," said the pallid-faced youth—who was proud to be thus singled out.

"I shall be obliged to you—I shall be greatly obliged to you," said the Editor, and therewith he went off to his own room, and sank heavily into his chair. He did not know what all this about the 'Braes of Glenbraon' might signify. And he could not quite trust Nurse Kendrick's report; after all, it was mere gossip, uttered under a pledge of confidence; perhaps kindness prompted it, and made it too favourable. And sometimes, in a wild sort of way, he wondered whether after all his old mother up there in the north might never see the gracious and glorious creature who had promised to be his wife. The poor old widow up at Dingwall was passionately and wistfully ambitious where her son was concerned; and proud she was of the mention of his name even in the obscurest of papers; she treasured up small cuttings and paragraphs sent her by friends and acquaintances. To him these things were sufficiently trivial. But if she were never to understand the crowning honour of his life?—if she were never to behold Eelin Macdonald in her radiant young beauty, and genius, and sarcasm, and laughter? Well, he always had borne with him a secret and inscrutable dread. His splendid fortune had carried him too far

and high. Only—only—if he could have one more look at Wild Eelin—at Eelin of the eyes like the sea-wave—restored to her ordinary gay exuberance of health—coming along by the Cathedral with her audacious freedom of step—crossing the Suspension-bridge with now a glance at the Castle hill and now at the sea-gulls hovering over the shallows at the Friar's Shot—appearing in Union-street, the tradesmen's books in her hand—nodding to this friend or to that one, and smiling with the wonderful smile that gladdened people—if only he could have a single look at her like this, it mattered little what became of him. Nay the prayer in his heart was that the 'belle dame sans merci' should yet again go 'singing on her way'—conscious or unconscious of the destruction she was causing. He would willingly step aside, if she wished to be free. But Eelin of the wave-blue eyes, grown proud and high-spirited again, rejoicing in the gaiety of her maidenhood, hail-fellow-well-met with gentle and simple—with the bare-legged boys of the river-side—with the grave members of the Town Council—with the courteous station-master: that was the dream before him. Despite Nurse Kendrick's comforting assurances, he had heard other reports, from perhaps as authentic a source. And still he held in his hand the papers from a member of the Assassins' Club; and still he could not formulate any answer to the sycophantic hireling; and still he could see nothing but the vision of a young girl, slim and erect of figure, and bold of step, crossing the Suspension-bridge and going along to Church-street and smiling to this one and that with her all-conquering eyes. He had no thought of intercepting her—no thought of obtruding himself upon her. If she were well, then for him the world was well. A distant glimpse of her was what he would crave for, and no more—and sometimes perchance she might have a kindly recollection of him.

A rap at the door aroused him from his longing reverie.

"Come in!" he called.

It was Tom Grieve, the sub-editor, who still and naturally maintained in a measure the familiar relations that had existed when Gilchrist was his junior.

"This is a rum start, it is indeed," said he, looking at the sheets in his hand—they had been forwarded by a News

Agency. "There can't be two Lord Mountmahons, I suppose?"

"It is to be hoped not," said Gilchrist.

"Well, then, the one you knew, the one who was down at Glengarva—who was hanging about the town at the time of the Northern Meeting—and was supposed to have an eye on Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig—yes, and who had you thrown into the river, as I imagine—well, he appears to have been overtaken—"

"By drink, of course," said Gilchrist.

"That is not the story, though I fancy drink may have been the origin of the affair," said the sub-editor, looking again at the loose sheets. "It's most extraordinary. The whole gang of them in a quiet and peaceable and respectable hotel in Dieppe; and then at midnight they begin to raise Cain; arrears of pay, or else they'll haul his lordship out of bed and trundle him into the harbour. Then a general scrimmage; Mountmahon appears to have come on to the landing outside his bedroom; and one of the sloggers hits him a clip on the back of the neck, and down he goes headlong to the foot of the stairs. Poor devil. Stone dead. He might have died in better company—that's all I'm going to say. Poor wretch—poor wretch. It's different with a young fellow who leads his men up a difficult border pass, and gets a bullet through his brain: he has died nobly, and his country remembers him; but to break your neck in an ignominious drunken brawl, amongst a lot of bullies—"

"Grieve," said the Editor, "will you make it smooth? He was known to the ladies at Glengarva House—and they, or one of them, might read the report. Make it gentle. Hush it up as much as you can."

"I'll strike it out altogether if you like," said the sub-editor—though reluctantly; for this was a great piece of news for the countryside, and of course there were competing prints.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE DEVIL'S KIRN.

EARLY next morning there was enacted the strangest scene ever beheld on the banks of the river Nish. Almost before daybreak Archie Gilchrist was out at his accustomed post, apparently busy enough with books and magazines and manuscripts, and yet ever with a furtive glance towards the red house across the wide stream. The dawn was graciously still and opalescent; the overclouded skies were of a banded silver-grey; the current, noiseless, stealing by, mirrored the foliage of the now yellowing trees; the smoke of the town, when that began to appear, rose vertically into the quiescent air and diffused itself into a pale blue film that softened all the wooded heights beyond. Peace reigned throughout the world; and in that house away over yonder why not also a beneficent and merciful peace?

Meanwhile this is what was happening in the sick-room.

"Nurse," Eelin called, in rather a frail voice, "will you do me a kindness? Will you go down—go down to the drawing-room—and search amongst the music—on the piano—and you'll find a scrawled piece—scrawled and scribbled over—but the title of it is 'The Braes of Glenbraon'——"

"Oh, if you will please to excuse me, Miss Eelin," the nurse said, anxiously. "Your mamma said I was not to bring you that song—because it upsets you so——"

"Oh, well," she said, with apparent indifference (but the eyes like the blue of the sea-wave were beginning to burn), "anything will do. I only want to look at the titles. My—my singing days are over. Why should I want to sing? It is happy people who sing. But the titles to look at: could you find for me 'Eelin of Kirkconnel'—'I wish I were where Eelin lies, on fair Kirkconnel lea'—Eelin, mind, not

Helen—you'll find the correct version in Maver—or in Moffat——"

"Oh, yes, Miss," said the prim and placid Nurse Kendrick. "As soon as ever the day nurse is here, or when some of the servants are about, I will run down and fetch the music for you——"

"And why not now?" the girl pleaded. "It—it is a small favour to ask: only a minute——"

The nurse hesitated—and was lost.

"What did you say was the song, Miss?"

"'I wish I were where Eelin lies, for night and day on me she cries'—I—I don't remember the rest—for my head is not very well—only—only I wanted to look at the titles—if I am never to be able to sing any more—"

"What did you say were the books, Miss Eelin?"

"Oh, I have forgotten—I have forgotten," the girl moaned. "And—it is too much trouble—I ask your pardon—"

The prim little nurse was also impressionable in a way; she could not resist the wearied appeal; she said she would try to find 'Eelin of Kirkconnel,' and should be back in an instant. It was a kindly concession, wrung from her by the pathetic tones of the girl's voice; but it was not very wise; and it had consequences.

For the moment she had gone, Wild Eelin—with the cunning and the unnatural strength of delirium—sprang from the bed, undressed herself, put on her swimming-things, not even excepting the felt slippers to protect her feet; then she crept stealthily down the staircase, and passed along the hall, and unlocked the door, and went out. Her footstep on the gravelled path was silent; phantom-like she crossed the breadth of grass; and so she came to the river—at least, to the shingle bordering the stream.

And this was the apparition that Archie Gilchrist, on the other side, beheld, when he chanced to look up from his books. He did not pay much heed. Somehow his eyes had become dazed of late, what with long watching, and mechanical reading, and sleepless nights; and no doubt the white-armed goddess on the opposite bank was but a spectral creation of his brain: in another moment or two she would have vanished and taken to flight, for her far and foam-girt isle. He hardly cared even to look at her. She was not an

effulgent and lustrous creature as a goddess should be; for the grey dimness of the dawn was still around her; she was a mere ghost, ethereal and visionary; he had been reading the night before some stories out of the Greek mythology; and he was of an imaginative turn of mind.

Then all of a sudden a spasm of horror shot to his heart. Why, this was no fantastic illusion whatever; he knew who it was, and why she was there; it was Eelin Macdonald, escaped from control, come down to make one more mad effort to swim the Devil's Kirn. In consternation he saw her take off her slippers at the end of the shingle; he saw her wade in through the shallows to the deeper water; he saw the fragile body throw itself against the heavy current; and in an agony of helplessness he could only wait and watch, not knowing whither she might be carried. But he had quickly taken off his coat and flung it on the grass behind him: so far he was prepared for anything that might happen. By this time there were nurses and servants rushing down the distant bank—calling, and shrieking, and wringing their hands: little attention did he pay to them.

It was piteous to see the frail white human creature contending with the ebon-black implacable stream; and of course the result was inevitable; with her spent strength she could make no headway at all; certainly she fought and fought, for she had the courage of the Kinvaig Macdonalds in her veins, and perhaps the fever lent her some access of wild effort. The end speedily came. She was swept down like some white rose-leaf on the surface of the water; the Devil's Kirn had got its grip of her; and hither and thither she was being whirled—until Archie Gilchrist saw his chance, and jumped in. He was a good swimmer, the swinging current notwithstanding. He seized hold of her—he bore her to the bank—he carried her to the slope where his coat was lying—in another moment she was wrapped up in that uncouth garment, and he had placed her arms around his neck, and he had clasped her firmly to him, as he set out for the house. He went in the direction of the upper suspension-bridge; he vaguely knew that the shrieking women were running across, with blankets and such things.

And then she said to him, in a panting kind of way—

"Oh, Somerled—my love! my dear love!—have you come for me at last? Ah, why did you never speak? I guessed,

you know—oh, yes, I guessed—and when you gave me the thousand pounds for the Macdonalds of Glengarva, my mother said you were either mad or madly in love—and if you were in love it was with me—and I guessed that too, though I would not let on. And as for me—my heart was yours from the moment I saw your strong, earnest eyes. But then, you see, I was promised; and I could not break my promise; and you were proud, and you held aloof, and would not say a word—ah, well, that is the bitterness of life——"

The mental torture was more than man could bear; he staggered towards the nearest bench, and sate down there, holding her closer to him, and trying to soothe her fevered imagination. Then the terrified nurse came flying, with rugs and blankets; and these she quickly wound round the trembling fugitive, who had some dim notion of what was going on. Nay, she tried to express her thanks, in a merry kind of way.

"Jeanie's a' weet, puir body," said she. "Do you know the old version, nurse? But it's not with 'coming through the rye.' I think I must have been in the river—perhaps—perhaps—and it is so cold this morning—and I have given you so much trouble—I ask for your pardon——"

Gilchrist had now got up again, with his precious charge folded to him closer than ever.

"Mr. Gilchrist," said the nurse, anxiously, "won't you let me carry her?"

"No, by God," said he, "nobody shall carry her but myself." His face was as white as death; and his arms trembled; but he had great physical strength; and there was not much fear for the invalid. The worst of it was that this arrangement enabled him—compelled him, rather—to hear her whispered confidences—confidences that tore his soul; for it was impossible to doubt that all through these wandering phrases the girl was revealing the secret of her life.

"You see, Somerled—oh, my darling!—my love with the strong eyes!—that you should have come back to me!—well, I used to go up the Castle hill—and I used to look towards Ben Wyvis—and—and—think about Alt-na-Traive; and sometimes Tannahill's verse would come into my head: 'Och hey! Johnnie lad, Ye're no sae kind's ye should hae

been'—and then I thought that was most unworthy—I—I admired you all the more for your pride and silence; because—because you knew that I had given my promise—didn't you? Ah, but never a word—never a word from Alt-na-Traive—and the long distance—and I am not complaining—oh no, I am not complaining—I would rather ask for pardon—from any one I have done wrong to——"

She sobbed a little; his heart heard her sobs. And here was her mother, at the end of the small suspension-bridge. The poor woman could hardly speak. It was her affrighted vision that made its mute enquiry. And then she followed her daughter—she the first, of course—though she could scarce put one foot before the other. With tremulous and useless fingers she would endeavour to draw the blanket somewhat closer round Eelin's neck; or with her handkerchief she would try to wipe away a few drops of water from the splendid blue-black hair; she was entirely distraught; she did not know what she was doing; her eyes were blind.

It was a long and roundabout way they had to come; and again and again they offered him help; but the white-faced man would have none of it. And every word she spoke, in that hushed, appealing voice, was like a dagger.

"Oh, my love, my love," she whispered, "you have come for me at last, and all I wish for is to lie in your arms for ever and ever—even in the grave. The 'Braes of Glenbraon' were never for you and me; they were for happy people; at least they were happy for a time—oh, I hope so—I hope so—even if there was a broken heart at the end; but for you and me it's more like Kirkconnel—you remember what he said after his sweetheart was shot—his prayer was 'And I in Eelin's arms lying, on fair Kirkconnel lea.' That was in the grave, you know. Well, why not? Tell me, Somerled of the brave eyes, are you listening—are you listening to me?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," he answered, and he hoped his voice would not undeceive her. "We shall soon be at the house now, and you'll be put to bed, and get warm."

She thanked him over and over again; and begged pardon for the trouble she was causing; nay, in a pitiful sort of fashion she seemed to think it was her duty, in return for this kindness, to entertain him.

"You know, dearest heart, they used to laugh at me," she said, with a fine pretence of cheerfulness. "Ah, yes, they did. They used to say that none of mankind was good enough for me—because—because—well, no man has ever kissed me, and that is the truth. And Lily Neile she would often sing 'There was anes a May—and she lo'ed na men—she—she biggit her bonnie bower—down i' yon glen' —I have forgotten the rest. But I never complained of their laughing—no, no: I waited to find my lord and master—and when I saw you and recognised you—I said to myself 'Well, perhaps he will allow me to go into the fields to glean a little, and I will be his handmaiden, if I should find favour in the sight of my lord.' And you commanded them to let fall some of the handfuls—ah, did you not!—did you not!—when I was doing small things here and there for Kinvaig and Glengarva. Thy handmaiden—thy handmaiden—ah, yes, willingly—willingly—but the fields and the sheaves were so far away—when I went on to the Castle hill I could not see them because of Ben Wyvis. Yes, and when I was seated on one of the benches, an old gentleman came up and said 'Tell me, young lady, why are you crying so?' I pretended I was not crying at all—that the distance to Ben Wyvis strained the eyesight; and when he went away I fell to crying again—but what was the use—what was the use—the sheaves were so distant—and the handmaiden—not able—not able to bow down before her lord—"

And yet again she tried to talk more cheerfully—in those hushed, hurried sentences—

"Gilchrist has been so kind to me—so kind—so kind and considerate. I think I must ask for his pardon. I was never to him what a sweetheart should be—I suppose not—according to the old songs—and he never once remonstrated—well, you see, we were so much engaged in our small literary plans and schemes—that was a kind of safeguard, no doubt. But—but—but when my lord of the strong eyes has come for his handmaiden, Gilchrist will set me free from the literary partnership—ah! I know him—I know him—all the way through it has been whatever I might wish—and some day—I will learn how to thank him."

He managed to get the swathed figure over or through

the turnstile; and she still murmuring to him. They were now close by Glengarva House. The weeping women had rushed forward to have the gate wide open.

"And Somerled—oh, my own, my own!" she said. "You know we must try to do something for Archie Gilchrist when he goes away to London to fight the great fight. Ay, and he will not fail. He will not fail. I know him. If all the Assassins' Club were confronting him, breast to breast, his right arm would send the whole crew of backbiters swinging to the wall. And we shall hear of him—and read of him—oh, it is such a wonderful thing to have won the praise of the world—and the affection of so many people—in different countries—all over the globe to have friends and well-wishers who are grateful to you—oh, yes, a marvellous thing—yes, and so few attain that—but I know he will—he will—he has the strength—he has the width of outlook—oh, yes—he will—he will—win to it. Do you know, Somerled, that he once called me the 'belle dame sans merci'—and I was to go 'singing on my way.' Ah, but I was never one of that kind. And I would have kept my promise—only—only—that my head has not been so well lately; and if you see Gilchrist, will you tell him that I ask his pardon; whatever happens, he is the one to forgive me, sure I am of that—"

He was taking her up the gravelled pathway, and she seemed to have some confused idea that she was nearing home.

"Somerled—Somerled," she moaned, "I am wishing to please you—but my voice is not what it was—something on the harp I could play for you, if you like the old airs. Not the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—oh, no, not the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—for there was unhappiness there—oh, my heart is like to break when I hear the 'Braes of Glenbraon'—I know all the Orain na'h-Albainn—and anyone that would please you—for I am sorry to be giving you so much trouble—I ask for your pardon—I ask for your pardon——"

He carried her to her room, and left the womenfolk to attend to her; then he went down into the hall, and took a chair there: his face was like the face of a dead man. Nor did they altogether neglect him. After a short while Jane the parlourmaid came running to ask whether he would not have some tea, or hot soup, or brandy; but he

only said "No, thank you—no, thank you" to these friendly suggestions. And Morag the Mull lass—her face 'sair begrutten'—not knowing what else she could do, brought cloths to wipe away the water from his ankles and feet.

"Morag, my dear," he said to her in Gaelic, "it is kind of you, but it is not necessary; could you not be of some service upstairs?"

And then the doctor arrived, and, with a curt nod of recognition, passed Gilchrist and went on: the case was too urgent to permit of formalities. The shivering, white-faced young man got up and began to interest himself with the stags' horns ranged along the wall. Oh, yes, there were some good heads—some fine royals, with admirable cups—only that his eye did not seem to convey any permanent impression to his brain. Undoubtedly, they were excellent heads, he strove to convince himself—brow, bay, and tray, all admirable—and likewise there were strange monstrosities too, quite worthy of inspection; and he tried to observe them, by way of passing the time; and he thought he saw them—but all the while his heart was listening for the first footfall on the carpet of the stairway.

"My good friend," said the doctor, when he came down, "you ought not to be here at all. You ought to be in bed. You are shaking as if with the palsy. No wonder, perhaps. But come away, I will drive you home——"

"The news, Doctor, the news—what do you think?" the younger man exclaimed.

He was hustled into the brougham, and the doctor followed.

"You'll have to get home at once, and drink some hot spirits and go to bed—for I don't want another patient on my hands just at present——"

"But—but—your opinion—what do you think of her?" he asked, in a frenzied fashion, as they drove off: he paid little attention to his own shiverings and shakings.

"Oh, well," said the doctor, cautiously, "such a shock to the system, in the middle of a high fever, is serious enough. Yes. Undoubtedly. Very serious. Very bad. But who knows?—she has youth and strong health on her side; never any young lady I have known was stronger in her health than Miss Eelin Macdonald: yes, yes, I have been

privileged to look on her swimming—in heavy water, too; and I've seen her rowing—the ease and grace of the stroke just admirable; and I've seen her throw a salmon-line—and who is there, man or woman, who can throw a better?—and all these things help—they help to build up a constitution; and she has all along been as strong as a young colt—and she may pull through anything. But it is you I have to deal with at present; and you are going home—and going to bed."

Archie Gilchrist went home; but he did not go to bed; when he had changed his clothes, he made straight for the Office of the Invernish *Observer*.

"Grieve," said he, to the sub-editor, "will you look after things for the next day or two? I may not be back—"

"But what's the matter?" said Grieve. "You look very ill!"

"Ah, that's nothing—that's nothing," he said. "If you would open letters and attend to affairs generally for a day or so—I am leaving by the middle-day train for Lairg; and the drive to Alt-na-Traive is long—"

"But, Gilchrist, you don't seem fit to travel anywhere!" his comrade remonstrated.

"Oh, yes, I can manage," he said. "I can manage. I am not made of sugar and salt. And you'll look after everything while I am away, won't you; and if there's any serious news you might telegraph to Alt-na-Traive—only—only I shall be back soon."

CHAPTER L.

TWO LOVERS.

The young editor of the Invernish *Observer* had become quite a known personage in the town; the railway porters touched their caps to him; the station-master, obliging as ever, hurried to see if he could find a compartment for him; and so he set forth. Little indeed of that journey could he afterwards recall. He must have looked out on the lapping waters of the Cromarty Firth—and on the wider sea-range up Dornoch way—and on the wooded heights by the Kyle of Sutherland; he must have seen them, no doubt; and yet without seeing them. He had come upon the strangest errand ever undertaken by mortal man. He could not shape his thoughts about it; it was too difficult. Besides that, his brain was tortured by a recurrent phrase: 'I ask for your pardon—I ask for your pardon.' That she—she—the beautiful clear-souled one—that she should be piteously asking pardon of all mankind—she who had never a thought of harm for any human creature, but quite the other way: she who wished to do well to every one—who was benignant, and generous, and kind to all around her—but especially if you happened to be poor—or abashed—or unfitted for her notice: this was a bewildering thing. The proud and radiant young lass: why should she have become so humble: why should she beg for forgiveness from all the world? Well, it was not much of that journey that in after days Archie Gilchrist could bring back to his mind.

The evenings were drawing in now; he resolved to pass the night at Lairg, instead of driving on through the dark to Alt-na-Traive; indeed, he was not in a hurry; he knew he had to formulate certain things in his own mind before the object of his mission could be accomplished; and a few

sleepless hours would serve. At dinner, in the coffee-room, he was so fortunate as to make the acquaintance of two clergymen who proved to be of a most genial temperament; they beguiled the solitude (for they and he were the only guests, the tourist season being quite over) they beguiled their enforced solitude with many merry tales and recitals of extraordinary experiences, chiefly connected with trolling for salmo ferox; nor did they monotonously confine themselves to fishing; nor were they very straitlaced about their japes; for example, when one of them told the story of a Scotch elder who said to his Minister: 'No, no, Minister, ye needna warn me against the sin o' sweerin; it's a bad thing, sweerin; I dinna sweer; I wouldna sweer; but sometimes I've been damned near it'—well, Gilchrist could only piously hope that the fable was new—perhaps it was even true. Then, when the brothers of the church had retired to the smoking-room, he went outside. There was a full moon, clear in the cloudless heavens; but also there were intervening trees, stirred by a light northerly wind; so that the swaying branches cut the luminous circle into multitudinous jagged and dazzling stars and planets that shone and scintillated suddenly here and there through the thick dark foliage. He would have liked Wild Eelin to have described this thing, in one of her discursive, frolicsome, but minutely observant papers.

Then he walked down to the side of the lake. It was a great breadth of mystic grey, with successive promontories, black as jet, appearing at receding distances; until, in the extreme west, the moonlight caught a bay of calm, and there was a bold scimetar-sweep of silver under the larch-woods and the spectral hills. If only Eelin could have seen it, to write about it, and make it for ever vivid!

He walked along to the weir, and stood and listened to the half-hushed hurrying voice, and he tried to make out if this or that one of Eelin's songs—any one of them—brave and valiant, or pitiful with the misery of bygone unhappy folk—could be heard through the confused nocturnal accompaniment. He stood and listened and listened, and tried to detect the sound of her voice, as often he had heard it: was it 'Logie o' Buchan, O Logie the laird, they hae taen awa Jamie that delved in the yaird'—or was it 'The auld Stuarts back again'—or was it something about 'Glenlin,

and Dunoon, and Loch Striven?' For she had become afraid of 'The Braes of Glenbraon'—and 'Kirkconnel Lea' was too suggestive of the grave. Ah, it was not 'And ye'll tak the high road, and I'll tak the laigh, and I'll be in Scotland before ye, But me and my true love will never meet again—' He stood and listened and tried to make out the faint echo of Eelin's voice; but he quite failed. It was the water-kelpie's voice that answered him: and that only said 'Eelin'—and 'Eelin'—and 'Eelin' in tones of unutterable sadness and farewell. For indeed his senses had got somewhat distracted; it was the one love of his life he was thinking of—the impetuous, splendid young creature that for a while he somehow seemed to have gained for himself—and to-morrow he was going to give her away to another man.

Next morning broke fine and still, with hoar-frost; that is to say, under the long-stretching shadows of the shrubs the grass was of a cold grey, but out in the open, where the sunlight fell, it was of a warm golden-green, the innumerable tiny spears glittering with diamonds of orange and dancing blue. He had ordered a waggonette to be waiting for him; when he went to the hotel-door he did not notice that for a second the driver glanced at him, or rather at his costume, in an odd sort of way. He took his place, and told the man to go on.

"It's rather cold this morning," he said, in a perfunctory fashion.

"Ay, sir, it is that," replied the driver, "and it will be colder when we get up to Crask, for the wind's off the hills."

And so they left the pleasant neighbourhood of Loch Shin—with its islands, and yellow promontories and its plantations all basking in the sun, and by and bye they emerged upon the vast and bare moorland, that now had a touch of snow on it. Nay, as they got up to the higher altitudes, the great expanse became of a solid white—a white as solid as the shoulders of Ben Armin, that seemed to reign over this desolate and silent realm. Here and there a robust clump of heather had shaken itself free, and stood black-brown on the edge of a knoll; but small individual features of that kind did not interfere with the general character of the landscape, that seemed to have

hushed itself to sleep, under a spotless shroud. There was not the whir of a bird's wing in all the voiceless waste.

And so the horses toiled on, up the lonely Strath Terry, with Ben Clebrig showing himself against the northern skies; and Gilchrist was lost in sombre meditation, until a remark from the driver startled him out of his reverie.

"They're coming, sir," the man said.

"Who are coming?"

"The funeral."

He looked along the road, or the faint indications of a road, and far away he saw a small black procession—the tiniest black dot it was—coming into the spacious, white, solitary world.

"But whose funeral?" he asked again.

"Mr. Macdonald, that was at Alt-na-Traive," the man answered, in obvious astonishment. "The old gentleman—was you not hearing of it, sir?"

"Why did they not tell me at Lairg?" Gilchrist demanded.

"We thought it was for the funeral you came through, sir; and no one would be liking to speak to you about it. Will I go off the road?"—for Highlanders do not care to meet a funeral.

"No, no," Gilchrist responded, sharply. "Keep to the road; but when the funeral comes up, then you can give them plenty of room to go by; and if Mr. Somerled Macdonald wishes to speak to me, he can either do that or pass on, just what he chooses."

The tiny black procession coming into the white moorland consisted merely of the hearse and one mourning carriage, and the mourning carriage had but one occupant. When he saw that this was Archie Gilchrist whom he had encountered, Somerled Macdonald ordered the drivers to stop, and Gilchrist got down and went across.

"This is very sad—and sudden," he said.

"Well, not so sudden," Somerled answered. "I had been warned by the doctor. And not so sad either. He died full of years and honour, and the greatest honour conferred upon him was the kindness of the ladies of Kinvaig. He had no expectation of any such thing when we came to this country—oh, no, none—for he was not a presuming man

—and their reception of him, and their continued friendliness towards him—became the crowning joy of his life. Well, both mother and daughter will find that he has not been ungrateful. Miss Eelin will find she has not been forgotten. But I am detaining you, and it is cold up here. You are going on to Alt-na-Traive?"

"No," Gilchrist answered, in great embarrassment. "My mission was to see you—but in these circumstances——"

"How can anything be altered?" Somerled Macdonald said, in his direct fashion. "If you are going back to Lairg, take a seat in this carriage, and let your waggonette follow. Then you can tell me at your leisure."

Gilchrist accepted this suggestion—and yet with some apology.

"If I had known," he said, as they continued on their way, "I should have come in proper clothes. But there was no intimation of any kind—"

"No," said his companion, "I will arrange about the newspaper announcements when I get to Invernish: it will be more certain there than writing from a remote hamlet like Alt-na-Traive. Still, I wonder you have not heard—for I sent a note to Glengarva House—"

"At Glengarva House," Gilchrist said, slowly, "I do not think they are opening letters just now."

The strong, refined features of the other man grew suddenly ashen-grey.

"What is that you mean?" he said at once.

And then Gilchrist told him all the tale that he had in a kind of way prepared and arranged in sequence; and he went on to defend his own position; and why he had come on this journey—not knowing of the funeral. For a while Somerled Macdonald sate silent. The clear, brown, contemplative eyes looked troubled: there was no other sign. At length he said—

"What the doctor told you about her splendid constitution is everything; clearly that is what he relies upon; and when she has pulled through, and become her natural self again, it will be time enough to talk about me. No, there will be no talk about me. People in delirium take wild fancies; and all these rambling references to the Castle hill, and Ben Wyvis, mean—just nothing at all."

Gilchrist shook his head.

"You may think what you like," he said, "but I know. The story she told me—mistaking me for you—was too consecutive. The secret she had kept hidden was no longer a secret, when she thought she was talking to you."

And then after a while Somerled Macdonald said—

"Why did you come to tell me all this—you who are engaged to be married to her?"

"I could have concealed it, no doubt," Gilchrist answered, calmly. "And probably, when the fever goes, she may have forgotten that she made these revelations. And she would keep her promise to me: I am certain of that; yes, I am certain of that. But then I should be a dishonoured man. And it is not for Eelin Macdonald to pass her life with a dishonoured man."

"You are making a great sacrifice," said the other, absently. "Only—only—how can one trust to what is said in delirium?"

"I do not ask you," Gilchrist answered. "But when she is quite out of this illness, you must go to her, and you must tell her from me that she is free—yes, yes, quite free to choose wherever her wish may fall—and then you may believe the story she confided to me when I was carrying her from the Islands to Glengarva House. And she will have no difficulty in understanding why you should present yourself before her. Well she knew what the thousand pounds meant."

"The thousand pounds!" said Somerled Macdonald. "The thousand pounds! When I would have the skin of both my hands flayed to make a lacing-string for her shoe!"

And so they went on through the wide, white, silent wilderness until they reached Lairg station, where the coffin was transferred, while they passed on to one of the usual compartments. They were pretending to talk about ordinary things—about the green of the firs showing through the snow—about the removal of the nets from the Kyle of Sutherland—about the letting of Langwell Lodge—and so forth; but perhaps their thoughts were elsewhere. Archie Gilchrist, for example, was conscious that in due time they would get down to Dingwall; and he knew of an old silver-haired dame there who now would probably never see Eelin Macdonald, and never understand how near he

had been to winning for himself the proud-eyed, proud-stepping daughter of the House of Kinvaig.

When they arrived at Invernish there was another necessarily tedious transference of the coffin, and Archie Gilchrist would have had his companion drive out with him to hear the latest tidings of the poor invalid. But Macdonald declined.

"No," he said, "until I have seen my father laid in that small churchyard in Glengarva, I must do nothing else. And indeed," he added, with some delicacy, "I was wondering whether you might not have gone on with me——"

"And I was thinking of it, too," said Gilchrist, "for I know it is just what Eelin herself would wish. Only, I must get news of her; and I will jump into a cab, and see if I can intercept the doctor anywhere; and then I will go home for a couple of seconds, to get into proper clothes; and I shall be back here before you are ready to start. And meanwhile you must get something to eat: it's a long way to Glengarva; and there is the Station Hotel—if you go into the coffee-room, I shall join you in a few minutes—"

In a very short time he was back; the subdued gladness of his face was its own report. Somerled Macdonald held out his hand, and it was grasped.

"It is well," Somerled said (with the grave eyes burning) "I can see it is well."

"Yes, yes," said the other, "the news is good. But I could not find the doctor; I chanced to come across the night-nurse, who was out for her usual walk; and she thought that Miss Eelin was going on first-rate, in spite of the tremendous trial. Oh, yes, her tone was confident, if it was cautious; and I think that some of us may yet hear Eelin Macdonald sing 'The Braes of Glenbraon'—no, no, not that one—she seemed to have a fear of that one—but any of her other songs—'O heard ye yon pibroch'—or 'Sweet sir, for your courtesie'—"

He turned away, and looked round the big dining-hall. He professed to be interested in the question as to whether the stags' antlers displayed along the cornice were real or manufactured. And when he came back to the small table that Somerled Macdonald had engaged, he asked whether the latest telegrams had come in about the Forfarshire election. Macdonald's firm eyes were not to be deceived. He said to

himself 'Here is a man whose heart is broken, by the bitter stroke of fate; and in all God's universe what atonement can be made to him for that? No, nor may one even offer a furtive word of sympathy!'

Thereafter they resumed their journey; and as their route lay along the east bank of the river, they came within sight of the Islands, and, on the opposite side of the stream, the red house with its black araucaria, its cedars, and its yellowed elms and limes. The sunlight was on the place, and all seemed happy and quiet.

"Do you see that open gate?" said Gilchrist—for the eyes of both men were fixed on the same spot.

"I know it."

"Ah, but some day the drive will not be so empty as it is now. You will find Eelin Macdonald come swinging along, with the joy of youth in her free way of walking, and the joy of youth in her greeting to this one and that. Look—they have left the gate open! Do you understand what that is for? Why, when she comes out for her first stroll, she will not be impeded! And of course Jane will be there, when the carriage comes out from the town; and Morag will have plenty of rugs; and I shouldn't wonder, when the landau goes by, if General Mallock were to hurry down to the front, to wave a glad congratulation to her. I can make out the whole picture; and I don't wonder that the servants, come running down to the corner of the pathway, to see her off, should be crying with delight; for Miss Eelin had a trick of making many friends, both gentle and simple; and when she first goes into Invernish, after her illness, the word will be passed round, and many a one will come out to shake hands with her and say something kind to her. Oh, yes, she had the way of making friends—"

"Gilchrist," said his companion, not without a certain anxiety, "do you know you have wrought yourself into a terrible pitch of excitement; and unless you quiet down, something may happen? The last news is good news: what more could you wish for? Now tell me how it was you chanced to be out here so early, the morning she dashed herself into the river?"

"Oh, well," said Archie Gilchrist—and the question did in a measure recall him to his senses—though these were disturbed enough—"I generally come out here about

daybreak ; the place is so quiet ; and I bring my books and papers with me, and get on a little bit with my work. And indeed I was so much engaged with these things that when I saw her come down to the edge of the river, at that time of the morning, I thought it was merely some phantasm of the brain—a ghost—a white ghost—which I could get rid of by shutting my eyes. But when she splashed into the stream, then I knew. It has always been her ambition to swim through the Devil's Kirn up to the weir ; and there were the women come shrieking down from the house ; and I knew. Yes, I knew. And I knew what the end must be ; and I waited on the bank until the swing of the current carried her down, and then I went in and got hold of her."

"Otherwise she would have been drowned ?" said his neighbour, with downcast eyes.

"Her strength was far spent," was the answer.

And then the straightforward eyes looked up again.

"You love this girl quite to distraction," said Somerled Macdonald. "And she has promised to marry you. And you have just saved her life. Yet you seem to suggest that I should take her away from you, on account of a few words spoken in delirium. My friend, even if there were any such impossible possibility—I am not a coward hound."

CHAPTER LI.

'TO EVERY MAID HER LOVER.'

THAT night they spent at Bridge of Kinvaig inn; the bullet-heads were no longer in possession; the remote little hostelry was quite quiet. And somehow, as the two men were seated in front of the fire, the talk always drifted back to Eelin Macdonald—Wild Eelin—Eelin with the eyes like the sea-wave, as her Highland friends called her; and Somerled seemed curious to know a little more of the literary side of her character, of which he had only heard vaguely.

"But that is just what I can tell you," Gilchrist responded, with something of eagerness. "Because she and I had been fighting each other, of course in the most good-natured way, for a long while back, in the columns of the Invernish *Observer*. And she always got the best of it—always: she is so witty, and sarcastic, and flaunting: she doesn't play quite fair, you know; when you think you have got her in a corner, she simply laughs at you, and goes off like a butterfly. Well, as you may imagine, if it had not been for that newspaper interchange of banter, I should not have presumed to make the acquaintance of Miss Macdonald of Kinvaig; but there were one or two little incidents; and she is no respecter of persons; she is too happy in herself: she wishes well to every one. And then, since I came to have a better knowledge of her, what has impressed me most is the extraordinary grasp and nimbleness of her intellect—why, when you are labouring with problems, she flips in with a half-mocking suggestion, and the whole thing is clear. She is so alert, and audacious; and yet she is most distrustful about anything she herself writes. Why I have here at this moment a scrap of verse which she

sent me for my opinion !—the opinion of an elephant on the song of a sky-lark ! — "

He fumbled about among his papers until he came upon the scrap of MS. ; and then he handed it over ; and this was what his companion read—and re-read more than once :

Loud winds, low winds : to every maid her lover ;
Where'er the sunlight shines, where'er the shadows hover ;
But my dear love comes never, oh never, back to me,
Nor by the shore, nor by the hills, nor by the Northern Sea.

" Are you going to publish this ? " he said, not lifting his eyes from the handwriting—which well he recognised.

" Oh, she may work it into something—who knows ? " said the other. " She is clever enough."

" Because," said Somerled Macdonald, " whatever value that is to the newspaper, I will give you five hundred times the value, if I may keep this for my own."

" Five hundred times nothing is still nothing," said Gilchrist. " As it stands the little fragment is of no use at all. Take it—keep it."

" And about a copy ? "

" Oh, I can remember well enough," Gilchrist made answer. " I can remember every word she ever wrote—that is, since I came to know who she was—who ' White Cockade ' was—who had been jibing at me for so long a while ; and of course a thickhead such as I am had no chance against her—not the least—with her quick-wittedness, and her knowledge of foreign literature, and of foreign places, and her gay humour : why, she pinned one at every corner. Do you think I complain ? No, I do not complain. It will be a proud day for me when I receive her next batch of MS., written in full exuberance of health ; and she may trounce away at me as much as she chooses. There will be no complaining, that day ! "

By and bye Gilchrist resumed :

" Of course, Mr. Macdonald, it may be very insolent on my part to assume that I shall have any share in the editing : because when you, in your overwhelming generosity, handed me over the Invernish *Observer*, it was on a distinct understanding. It was to be a sort of dowry for Miss Eelin Macdonald. It was to give me a better position, so that I should not demean her in the eyes of her friends. Well,

that is all past. And when you and I return to town, and when you present yourself before her, I know what will happen. And then I will surrender back to you the proprietorship and the editorship of the paper——"

The clear-brown eyes leapt out at him, in involuntary anger.

"Again must I ask you if you think I am a coward hound?" Somerled Macdonald demanded. "What I give, is given. It is no longer mine. Am I going to receive back a gift?"

"It was a gift, bestowed conditionally," the other suggested.

"I named no conditions: it is a gift," said Macdonald, with certain lines about his mouth that showed Gilchrist there was little use in further remonstrance: it was not the first time he had discovered the strength of decision in this man—though, to be sure, he himself was not much deficient in firmness of will.

And again he said—

"You see, Mr. Macdonald, I always had a conviction that the small literary copartnership that existed between Miss Eelin and me would end in nothing else. It could not. It was not in the nature of things. And if I must suffer for my presumption, then I must suffer; but it was what I had foreseen. Yes, I dreaded it all the time. My fortune had gone too high. Yet she would have kept her promise: that I know. She had a wild imagining that I was to do great things in literature; and that my ambition was to be her pride. Well, my ambition—and I would give my life for it—is to see Eelin Macdonald once more strong enough to be out in the white boat and throwing a line over the Devil's Kirn."

"Ay, but you will see more than that," his companion said, calmly. "You will see her fishing the best pools on the Garva river, and herself the mistress and owner of every one of them. Does that surprise you? Well, hitherto it has only been a kind of dream; but sometimes dreams come true. And now I will tell you the story: it is better you should be prepared. When my father and I first went out to Glengarva House, the windows in the drawing-room had been left open, and in the garden there was a girl singing; and the tones of her voice went straight to my heart—so

that—so that—but I cannot describe it: I suppose it happens to a man once in his life. And then she came into the room. Ah, but you know her; you have seen her in the radiance of her young enthusiasm and her wit and her beauty, and her kindness and courtesy to every soul around her. Well, then, when my father and I set out for the town again, we went out by the well where the sweet water is—you know—and crossed over to the Islands—then I put my project before him. I said I was willing to begin life again as a poor man, if only I could buy back enough of the Garva strath to re-establish the Kinvaig family in the old home of their race. He laughed. He said I was mad. He said I had been bewildered by the eyes of a girl; and that I wanted to win her favour that way. It was not so. If my original scheme had been carried out, no human being would ever have known who had re-instated the Macdonalds of Kinvaig in their ancient possessions—because—because—well, I should have left the country. My father was against the plan at first. He said it was a mere fantasy. But all the same it dwelt in his mind; he kept talking and talking about it when we were up at Alt-na-Traive; and I know a blind man can see a lot, when he is thinking. And at last—we were along at Morten's Bay, I remember, but not occupied much with the fishing—for the weather was so still and clear—at last he said 'Somerled, when we get back to the inn, you must sit down and write at once to Gibson and Galbraith, and ask them if they can discreetly find out something about Glengarva—that is to say, what is the length of Lord Mountmahon's lease, and whether Sir Charles Orme would be prepared to sell, supposing the tenancy were to lapse, and what would be the probable cost of the Kinvaig property, including the house, and the fishing rights all the way down.' He spoke in an off-hand kind of way; but I knew he had been thinking. Yes, he had been thinking, to some purpose, as the ladies at Glengarva House will discover ere long. For the way is pretty clear now. The Mountmahon scum have been washed out of the place. And Sir Charles Orme is not so prosperous that he is likely to refuse a good offer. He will come to terms. It can be managed, I think; but—but—if only my father could have lived to know that the Macdonalds of Kinvaig were established in the old home

of the name! And there's many a one out there in Canada will hear and rejoice; and the news will spread; and many is the bonfire that will be lit when the transaction is completed, and the old family restored. My father used to talk of it as a dream and a fantasy; but it is his money that is going to do it—"

"And he has not left his money to you?" said Gilchrist, with a start.

"Man alive, what do you take me for?" the other retorted. "I would rather earn my weekly wage as a platelayer on the Canadian Pacific Road than seek to interfere with such a grand idea. Yes, there will be bonfires. The news will spread. I will take care of that. I will take care there are bonfires when the news is telegraphed over that the Macdonalds of Kinvaig are going back to the old home of the race."

Gilchrist had never seen this man, usually self-repressed and silent, so excited—though he strove to conceal his excitement. His hands were clenched, that they might not betray any trembling.

"I should not wonder," he continued, "if Miss Eelin made a little speech, from the doorway of the house; she is bright enough for that; she is bright enough for anything: and I will have it telegraphed over, and published in all the Canadian papers. I should like to have a picture of that. The old people will be crying. Angus the water-bailiff will not be far away. The children will be nearest the door, and perhaps they may have a few bunches of flowers to offer. And when Miss Eelin comes out to shake hands with every one, young and old, I do not know whether she will be laughing or crying—perhaps both—but she will have a good deal of Gaelic to talk that day, because many of the people will have come in from the glens, and Gaelic is more expressive. My poor father used to picture all this scene, behind his blind eyes. He would speak of it in the evenings. And mostly the o'er-come was 'Where can I get a piper able enough to compose for me a march "The Kinvaig Macdonalds back again"—for that must be played when the Bean-an-Tighearn and her daughter arrive at the old family home.'"

Then Macdonald got some stiffer control over himself; and he said—

"There's another side to the scheme. You know that all the West Highlanders who go abroad do not prove good colonists; they have not been educated up to scientific agriculture; they have not much money amongst them; and incessantly and longingly they are looking back to the old country of the brae-sides and the lochs. Very well. My father has set aside a sum so that any of the Ontario Kinvaig people who have not been very fortunate, and who want to get back to the old home, shall be provided with a free passage; and a further provision is that the ladies of Kinvaig—at their convenience, of course—not disturbing them in any way—will out of the same fund secure for these people some little croft or steading, or perhaps some farm work, along the strath. Now, do you not think that is an undertaking that Eelin Macdonald will delight in?—because she has always been so benevolent; and she knows the Gaelic; and never was a Queen in any land thought of as she is thought of by the Kinvaig Macdonalds. And I must have a picture of that—there are plenty of artists always painting about the Highlands—and he must make a good composition of it, you know—the girl coming out to the doorstep of the house—in the sunlight—and smiling and shaking hands with this one and that, while the piper is standing by ready to play 'The Return of the Macdonalds of Kinvaig.' Do you think I am blethering?" he went on, with his lips full of determination. "But I am not. And what my father has failed to supply—if he has failed to supply anything—that I will supply—for I have a little money of my own—my father's will does not affect me much. And when the picture is painted, it must be sent over to Ontario; and there I will have it photographed, and the photograph enlarged, and any number of copies made, so that in every cottage or house, whosoever likes may have the scene of the 'Welcome Home'—the young girl the central figure—in the sunlight—and laughing—and shaking hands—her blue Tam o' Shanter on the black hair—and her gentle mother looking on in quiet delight—not interposing—no, no—rather admiring the appearance of her daughter as queen of the ceremony. Do you think I am blethering?" he repeated. "Why, man, I have two hands; I do not care what happens to me; I can earn my living!"

He was evidently labouring under great excitement, in

spite of his intention of self-control; and Archie Gilchrist said to him—

"But, Mr. Macdonald, you talk in such a strange way—you speak as if you were to be absent from all these great doings——"

"I?" responded his companion. "It is not for me to be there. There may be great doings, no doubt; and many of the old Highland families will send a representative; and perhaps the Queen will dispatch a messenger, carrying congratulations to one that was her Maid of Honour in former days; but I—what should I be doing there? Money is a vulgar thing. It gives you no claim. It may set the machinery going; but the unseen person should be down in the stokehole. No, my friend; to-morrow morning, when I have seen my poor old father laid in his last resting-place—and I know it was an honour he coveted—oh, yes, he was not a self-asserting man—far from that—but there was one honour he coveted, that his bones should lie in the old churchyard of Kinvaig: and that has been all arranged; and when the brief ceremony is over, well, then, I can drive you down to Invergarva, but after that you must make your home, for I am bound for Liverpool, and then away to Quebec."

Gilchrist's lips grew rather white.

"And that is what you shall not do," said he. "Once or twice you have asked me whether you were a craven hound. Well, I say you are, if you do not come with me to Glengarva House, and see Eelin Macdonald face to face, and demand of her if my story is true or false."

For a long while Somerled Macdonald remained silent. At last he said—

"It is not a pleasant ordeal for any man to encounter. If she were to say to me: 'You take advantage of a few words spoken in fever; and you betray this confidence; and what are you but a treacherous friend?' Oh, I can see the great eyes glowing with indignation! It is not an easy ordeal for any man to encounter."

"Ah, but I know," Gilchrist answered him. "And as for the betrayal of confidence, well, then, I was the betrayer. But I could not live all my life dishonoured. Yes, yes, I am aware that Eelin Macdonald would have kept her promise to me; I am aware of that; she is too proud-

spirited for anything else. But you are coming with me into Invernish; and you are going to tell her she is free; and then whatever happens—happens; only I shall not have been dishonoured, and, I tell you again, it is not for Eelin Macdonald of Kinvaig to marry a dishonoured man."

CHAPTER LII.

FAREWELL.

It was on a brilliant and cheerful and shining day that these two drove along towards Invernish. And all their talk—now that poor Allan Macdonald had been laid to his rest—was chiefly of a practical turn, concerned, indeed, with the great project of having the Macdonalds of Kinvaig restored to their ancestral home. A brilliant day, indeed: the yellowed branches of the elms and the limes burned strong against the turquoise sky; the river went shivering down in silver; the far heights of Ben Wyvis, when they came in sight, were of a soft azure and clear to the top.

But at a turn of the road, as they were getting down towards the Islands, Somerled Macdonald all of a sudden put his hands before his face, and tried to conceal that he had burst into a fit of crying and sobbing.

"But what is it—what is it?" Gilchrist exclaimed in alarm.

"Oh, my God, don't you see?" the other managed to answer him. "All the blinds in Glengarva House are down—at mid-day."

Gilchrist called on the driver to stop.

"I must have more certain news—there may be some mistake—I will not detain you but for a few moments."

He leapt down from the waggonette, flung his coat and cap on the bank, and slipped into the black-brown water, just above the Devil's Kirn. He was an excellent swimmer, and the river was low. Soon he was across to the shallows; and when he reached the dry shingle and the rowan bushes

and the pathway, he ran with all his might of running until he disappeared within the gate. When, after a brief space, he came out again, the strength seemed to have gone from him: he walked like a broken man.

Of course he had to plunge into the river again, and fight his way over to the Devil's Kirn, but when he rejoined his companion, he had hardly a word to utter.

"Yes, it's true," he gasped. "And all the way over I was dreading. It happened this morning, I was told. And at the last she was quite conscious. And she contrived to pencil two messages—one for you and one for me—and they were sent in to the *Observer* office. Let us get on," he said, as he pulled his coat round his shivering shoulders. "It will be the last sound of her voice."

In silence they drove in to Invernish, and in Somerled Macdonald's heart there was the agony of a refrain: it seemed to come from far away—and yet to have a piteous human cry in it—

Loud winds, low winds: to every maid her lover,
Where'er the sunlight shines, where'er the shadows hover;
But my dear love comes never, oh never, back to me,
Nor by the shore, nor by the hills, nor by the Northern Sea.

When they reached the town they made straight for the *Observer* office, and in the editorial room it was easy to pick out the two letters they sought, for Eelin generally used a peculiarly-shaped envelope, and besides they could readily recognise her handwriting, even in the frail and uncertain scrawl of the blue pencil. This was the one letter addressed to Somerled Macdonald.

'To him that was too proud, too honourable, to speak. But well I knew—ah, well I knew; and this is only a word of kindly good-bye. And I hope you will not quite forget

'EELIN.'

And this was the other, addressed to Gilchrist.

'DEAR ARCHIE,

'You must now go and fight the great fight in

London, and win a name for yourself, wherever English is known. And if I have done wrong to you at any time—or if you think I have done wrong, I ask you for pardon.

'EELIN MACDONALD.'

And out there in Glengarva House a mother was kneeling by a bedside, and she was saying—

"Dear God! merciful God! will you not take my life, and give back hers to her, that was so resplendent in her youth, and had all the years before her. Or will you let me go to her—let me go to her!—she has never been used to be alone. And—and perhaps I could hear her speak again; and she would welcome me—ah, but I know she would!—she would run to me—and she would look at me—and I should hear her speak again, with the voice that had all the wonder of the world in it——"

Now in this household of whimpering women—whimpering in secret corners, with an affectation of going about their ordinary duties—there was only one of them who had left with her a grain of courage and common sense, and that was Morag the red-headed lass from Mull. For she entered and went boldly to her mistress, and put a hand on her arm, and the hand of Morag was strong.

"Mistress," she said, "come away now, for what is the use of greetin'? Come away down to the drawing-room—"

"It is where she used to sing!" was the pitiful protest—with another outburst of wild weeping. "My Eelin, that had the sweetness of all the world's music in her voice:"

"To the dining-room, then—"

"It is where she used to go from one window to the other, watching Fergus fishing down the pools—and to think she will never again be calling to him—"

But Morag was not to be gainsaid; and her grasp was firm.

"Mistress, come away now. I have been through some trouble myself. And what is the use of greetin' for hours? Come away now, and we will go into the garden, and I will show you the corner where Miss Eelin was so clever at getting the last of the raspberries. Oh, she had the sharp eyes! And never for herself, if there were any children about. She would call to little Maggie Maxwell—'Maggie,

here, here!—can you see that one? Or can you reach that one?'—and she would laugh and bend down the branches. Come away now, mistress, and take my arm, and I will show you the corner where she used to get the last of the rasps."

THE END

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